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UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN  
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION  
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

## MINOR DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Masters in Education

### TITLE

Current literacy instructional practices in a  
Grade One classroom within the context of the  
South African Outcomes-based curriculum:  
A case study

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### Declaration

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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16 February 2004

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## **Abstract**

Improving the level of literacy for all learners, including those from diverse socio-cultural and economic backgrounds, is high on the list of priorities for education in South Africa. Grade One teachers are currently working within an outcomes-based educational and literacy framework. This implies that teachers have to know and understand what is entailed in each of the learning areas and they have to plan the content of the learning programmes according to the expected outcomes.

While traditional literacy instruction focuses on skills development, contemporary approaches advocate language and literacy practices that reflect a socially constructed model of learning and knowledge. The latter emphasizes interaction through language, between the learners and their cultural worlds, in as well as outside the classroom.

The purpose of this study is to examine the role of classroom talk in effective literacy instruction, by observing how literacy is presented and modelled by one teacher in a particular Grade One classroom. This study investigates whether current classroom literacy practices are aligned to those envisaged by the South African literacy outcomes. It also investigates whether a relationship exists between the practices that are intended in the literacy outcomes of the South African Outcomes-based curriculum and the Four Resources Model of Freebody and Luke (1990).

The report is based on a socio-cultural orientation to the study of literacy learning and instruction. It draws on compatible socio-constructivist and dialogic perspectives (Gee, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978 and Bakhtin, 1981) and explores the literacy model suggested by Freebody and Luke (1990). This study finds that corresponding elements between their model and the South African literacy outcomes highlight that, in addition to basic reading and writing, literacy involves understanding, using and engaging critically with a variety of texts.

The case study involved the observation of classroom literacy activities in a co-ed, English, Grade One classroom in a parallel-medium primary school, with learners from diverse socio-cultural, economic and language backgrounds.

The study finds that the teacher's current skills-based instructional approach only partially reflects what is envisaged by the South African literacy outcomes. She overemphasises behaviour management and phonics instruction, but neglects proper

engagement with a greater selection of texts. The study shows that, although learning the basic skills of coding and semantic competence is necessary for effective literacy learning, teachers should expose learners to an expanded range of literacy practices that will enable them to respond effectively to the literacy demands in everyday life. Teachers should be encouraged to move beyond their usual instructional methods and to use innovative strategies to enhance the literacy learning experience. A literacy framework in the South African context should allow learners to explore, read, work with, create and look critically at a range of texts.

University of Cape Town



# **Chapter 1**

## **1. Introduction**

The search for the right method to improve literacy achievement, has been the focus of literacy research and discussion for many years and continues to be debated, while the learners continue to struggle with the instructional challenges in the classroom, on a daily basis. The importance of literacy achievement in the first three years of school, cannot be overemphasized as future success in learning is dependent on how well the learners are able to apply their literacy knowledge and skills to the tasks of future learning.

The continued literacy development of all learners becomes important, as no child should be left behind in the process of becoming literate adults. Teachers have the daunting task of making decisions about the most suitable instructional methods to ensure effective literacy experiences and instruction for all their learners, who have diverse literacy and learning needs. It is important to be aware of the literate practices that are being used in classrooms and how well the learners are learning to develop and apply those practices in their everyday lives in school, the home and the community. There is an urgent need to determine what happens in classrooms to enhance the development of effective literacy practices.

For effective and high quality literacy teaching, the focus needs to be on pedagogy - how teachers work with learners and how they engage them in suitable activities with literacy texts. It is important to note that teachers have been trained in literacy instruction in very specific ways over the years and have comfortably been applying these methodologies in the classroom. The manner in which most teachers teach literacy in the classroom, is directly related to the teachers' definition of literacy and their beliefs about how meaning and knowledge are constructed. These beliefs also play a dominant role in the resources that they choose to use and the environment that they create in their classrooms (Serafini, 2003). The way that teachers teach in their classrooms is founded on a set of assumptions about teaching and learning, and what can be regarded as literacy. Teachers mostly

appear to take the assumptions shared by other teachers and they seldom take the time to reflect on their methodologies.

Chall (1967) found that there had been very little research on how learners are taught in the classroom and that most teachers use the prescribed method in teachers' manuals of reading series in the teaching of literacy. It has also been found that many teachers use the skills-based or phonic-drills approach, because that is what they were taught during their training as teachers and which they have experienced as being effective in their experiences during literacy instruction over the years. The skills-based approach is grounded on the conviction that children need to learn certain basic skills of printing and letter formation before they can read and write successfully. Therefore, teachers should focus on basic coding and decoding skills, rather than the meaning-making dimensions of literacy.

Outcomes-based education (OBE) in South Africa and a curriculum that aims to provide learning experiences that accommodate the needs of the learners, was implemented in Grade One classes in 1998. Teachers have undergone initial training sessions, which lasted for five days and have received ongoing support and development, to enable them to implement the literacy outcomes in their classes. Since the implementation of this curriculum, five years ago, the Grade One teachers have been expected to plan suitable learning activities that would enable the learners to achieve and demonstrate the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are envisaged in the seven literacy outcomes of the outcomes-based curriculum (Western Cape Education Department Policy Document, October 1997). It has become necessary for teachers to know exactly what literacy instruction their learners could benefit from, which learners are managing to cope with that which is expected of them, and which learners do not manage to achieve the literacy outcomes.

An important question that guides my deliberations about literacy is: Which forms of literate practices are the most appropriate for young learners to learn in today's challenging and dynamic environment? For the past decade, a number of complex local, national and international conditions have arisen in society and are impacting on the efforts of educators towards literacy development in the classroom. School communities have become culturally, socially and linguistically diverse because of the demographic changes caused

by the mobility of communities. The result is that, to help learners successfully achieve the learning outcomes, certain teachers try all possible approaches to accommodate their different cultural and language literacy needs, while others merely do skills-based teaching.

It is worth noting that the children in our schools, who come from diverse home and socio-economic backgrounds, have different home literacy experiences. In the more wealthy communities, financial resources are available to expose children to a variety of literacy experiences. They work with computers, the Internet, television, videos, on-line communication and have access to the very latest books and stationery. On the other hand, in the poverty-stricken communities, there are children who do not even have any experience with reading and writing before they start formal schooling in Grade One.

This study will examine whether the instructional practices of a specific Grade One teacher are in accordance with the implementation of the South African outcomes-based curriculum and whether the teacher's current approaches to literacy teaching are drawing attention to the kinds of knowledge and resources that learners need in this changing society.

The purpose of this study is to determine how literacy is presented and modelled by the teacher for the benefit of the learners in one particular classroom. The research questions set in this study seek to define the nature and content of the literacy learning programme and the strategies the teacher had been using at the time of the study, to guide the learners towards the achievement of the literacy outcomes. The study attempts to determine whether the approach followed by the teacher is aligned to what is intended by the outcomes. It further aims to identify whether a relationship exists between the practices that are intended in the literacy outcomes of the South African Outcomes-based curriculum and the Four Resources Model of Freebody and Luke (1990). Luke and Freebody suggest that learners develop not just one technical skill, but four specific literacy practices: the ability to 'crack the code'; to participate in understanding meaningful texts; to understand the different ways in which texts are used and to look critically at texts. These practices will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter and in Chapters Two and Three. The competencies envisaged by the outcomes, will then be discussed in relation to the practices suggested in the model of Freebody and Luke.

## **2. Background to the problem**

### **2.1 Sociological issues**

In 2000, research was done as part of the systemic evaluation of Grade Three learners within the outcomes-based framework, in all the provinces in South Africa. Systemic evaluation is the assessment of the extent to which the education achieves set social, economic and transformational goals. The research report has since indicated that the scores for literacy ranged from 37% to 49% (Western Cape Department of Education, August 2002). These low test scores have been viewed as unacceptable and have captured the attention of the media, education officials and educators (Cape Argus, March 25, 2003; June 10, 2003). This state of affairs has continued to remain high on the agenda of concerns in education. School district officials have since been instructed to decide on a plan of action to address the low literacy scores in the districts. The education department has embarked on a literacy strategy to support the teachers in their efforts to improve the learners' literacy development, which included resourcing each school with one hundred books for literacy development purposes.

This concern about literacy has now become the focus of the media who appear only to emphasize how poor the learners' literacy levels are in schools. This is echoed by political leaders who have their own agendas regarding literacy. With the upcoming political elections in this province, politicians are eager to highlight areas of concern, especially in education. What politicians fail to do, is realize that there are complex problems within specific contexts of literacy education, which need to be brought into the discussions about literacy improvement. Socio-cultural aspects such as the home environment, social and economic circumstances of learners, access to resources and language, must be considered as factors that could influence the learner's achievement of literacy. Print-rich home environments and regular reading aloud of stories by the parents, will do much to enhance the home literacy experiences of the learners. Regular opportunities for communication between the young learner and his/her parents, siblings and friends, will expand his/her vocabulary knowledge. Discussions for the improvement of literacy levels should focus on the holistic development of the child, including social, emotional, physical, intellectual and family-related aspects.

The orientation to literacy practices that today's young people need in order to cope with all the challenges of the changing world, remains a cause for concern. As part of reflective teaching practice, it should be asked: What are the links between the ways of doing reading and writing that children are learning in school and the ways of reading and writing that characterize later schooling, as well as the domains of social life?. Therefore, it must be a regular practice of teachers to reflect on what they do on a day-to-day basis in the classroom to achieve the literacy outcomes and to improve, if need be, what occurs in classrooms and schools with regards to literacy development.

## **2.2 Theoretical issues**

Before the implementation of the Outcomes-based curriculum in South Africa, and before the new democracy of 1994, different education departments existed for different race groups in the Western Cape. The teachers within these departments were trained differently and consequently used different approaches in the development of literacy, such as the phonics method and the whole language method. Basal readers were used by most of the departments for the teaching of literacy. The teachers were very often forced to use very prescriptive reading programmes that would instruct them on how to teach, step-by-step, regardless of their beliefs and understanding. Media reports over the years have shown that there have always been debates about the most appropriate literacy method for schools. According to Cairney (2000), that specific debate seems to focus on what we should teach in the name of literacy and whether we should be teaching it in a specific way. We need to bear in mind that each method has been proven to have its share of criticism, mistrust and objections.

Over the last twenty years, a movement called "The New Literacy Studies" (NLS) has developed an approach to the study of literacy, which does not study literacy simply as an individual skill to be learnt (Gee, 1996; Street, 1995 and Freebody and Luke, 1990). Rather, literacy is seen as part and parcel of social, cultural and political practices. The NLS argues that instructional methods should be framed within school-based literacy practices and that those practices should be integrated with issues of culture, social practice and power in schools, homes, communities and society at large. The New Literacy

Studies emphasizes that literacy learning is integrated with language, social activities and other cultural forms of thinking, knowing and believing.

The main message of the New Literacy Studies, with regard to classroom pedagogy is the need to respect the learners' different cultural and linguistic resources (Gee, 2000). The teacher, in a socio-culturally diverse site like a school, needs to acknowledge the richness of the experiences of the learners. Language and literacy learning are social processes. According to Gee (1992), our ways of talking, thinking, believing and interpreting are linked to the different discourse communities to which we belong. Gee (1990) argues that the focus of literacy should be on the way in which we speak and are spoken to in our everyday lives. According to Gee (1992), learners learn much from the social practices within the groups to which they belong and with whom they interact and play on a daily basis.

The literacy outcomes in the South African curriculum state that learners must interact with a variety of texts. Since the training of Grade One teachers for the implementation of the Outcomes-based curriculum, classroom observations done in my capacity as curriculum advisor, have indicated that Grade One teachers are attempting to use more than one approach for the teaching of literacy. Teachers are resorting to the use of commercially produced literacy programmes, which have increasingly become available on the market since the implementation of the Outcomes-based curriculum. It is my concern that these packages do not allow for the diverse needs of learners and that some of those packages have a very narrow understanding of literacy, by only focusing on decoding and spelling, while neglecting comprehension.

### **2.3 Pedagogical issues**

The instructional practices of literacy used in classrooms over the years, align with specific theoretical perspectives associated with literacy learning. I shall outline three influential, but not exclusionary perspectives below, as cited by Serafini (2003).

### **2.3.1 A modernist perspective**

The perspective that is based on the belief that certain technical or cognitive skills are necessary to uncover the meaning in texts, is referred to by Street (1984) as a modernist perspective. This perspective has manifested itself in classrooms in the form of skills-based approaches to teaching reading. The teachers working from this perspective, teach phonics directly, but use whole language approaches as well. Their emphasis during literacy teaching, is on the decoding of texts and fluent reading with comprehension.

### **2.3.2 A transactional perspective**

Serafini (2003), drawing from Rosenblatt (1978), agrees that the transactional perspective emphasizes the involvement of the reader's prior knowledge and experience in the construction of meaning in texts. The focus in this perspective is on the reader constructing a personal understanding of a particular text, in a particular context. Teachers use this approach during whole class and group work instruction, where learners have discussions and share individual understandings of the text.

### **2.3.3 A critical perspective**

A critical perspective acknowledges that social, historical and political factors affect literacy and the meanings that are constructed between the reader, the text and the context. Each reader brings with him/her diverse previous social, cultural and historical knowledge and understandings that could influence his/her interpretation of texts. Texts are therefore never neutral and allow for critical conversations (Luke, 1995). The introduction of the Outcomes-based curriculum, which puts an emphasis on context in the teaching of literacy, intends to inform teachers that meaning is grounded within the social, political and cultural context of that reading experience.

Luke (1995) is of the opinion that, although teachers might understand and use all of the above-mentioned perspectives, it is important that their classroom literacy approaches aim

to develop a wide range of competencies that are necessary to function as a fully literate person in society.

### **3. Statement of the problem**

The background knowledge to this problem, as discussed in the previous section, indicates possible aspects that could be contributing to the unsatisfactory literacy achievement of learners during the systemic evaluation process. From Grade Four onwards, the separation of the learning areas of the curriculum for instruction and assessment, poses more challenges with regard to communication, reading and writing for the learners. There are eight learning areas, namely: Language, Literacy and Communication; Human and Social Sciences; Technology; Mathematical Literacy, Mathematics and Mathematical Sciences; Natural Sciences; Arts and Culture; Economics and Management Sciences; and Life Orientation (Western Cape Education Department Policy Document, October 1997). Each learning area has unique literacy demands that are specific to the needs of that learning area. For example, one of the specific outcomes of the Natural Sciences learning area requires that the learner demonstrates an understanding of concepts and principles, and constructed knowledge in the natural sciences (ibid, p. 151). Each learning area makes contributions to the development of an individual's literacy capacity. As learners move into different situations or specialized areas of learning and experience new technologies, they are continually required to adapt and extend their knowledge and literacy skills so that they may understand and use language appropriately. Learners who have the knowledge, skills, attitudes and understandings to engage with all the literacy demands of the learning areas in the curriculum, will be able to complete their schooling successfully. It has therefore become important to study the literacy practices of Grade One teachers in the classroom, in order to determine whether their current understandings of the literacy are directing their instruction towards the successful achievement of those literacy outcomes. Sufficient achievement of the literacy outcomes at the end of Grade Three, will assist the learner to cope with the literacy challenges from Grade Four onwards.



#### **4. Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study is to determine how literacy is being presented and modelled by the teacher in this particular Grade One classroom. It is also the intention of this study to observe and analyse the nature of the literacy-learning programme and to find out which practices are being included and neglected, with reference to the practices intended in the literacy outcomes. This study attempts to discover whether there is a relationship between the literacy outcomes envisaged in the current curriculum and the socio-cultural literacy model that is suggested by Freebody and Luke (1990). The Four Resources Model of Freebody and Luke (1990), suggests that teachers frame their teaching and assessment of literacy around the four roles of literacy learners: as code-breakers, text participants, text users, as well as text analysts.

- As code-breakers, the learners develop the competence to 'crack the code' of a text, in order to clarify difficult words and concepts.
- As text participants, the learners will develop semantic competence, which will enable them to figure out what texts mean to them as readers. They will use their existing knowledge to make sense of texts, to relate the new knowledge to their own lives, and to summarize the information when they read.
- As text users, they will develop pragmatic competence, to enable them to understand the purpose and uses of different texts. The learners will recognize that each text type has particular structures and features.
- As text critics, the learners will develop the ability to be critical about texts, in order to interpret the meaning of the text and the intentions of its author, based on the learners' own experiences. The learner will understand how texts are purposefully crafted by the author to influence the reader. This literacy model will be described in more detail in Chapter Three.

## **5. The research question**

The research question that this study will focus on is: 'What is the nature and the content of the literacy learning programme and the teaching strategies that a teacher is currently using to guide the Grade One learners towards the achievement of the literacy outcomes?'.

Secondly, it is asked: "Are the current classroom literacy practices aligned to the practices that are envisaged in the literacy outcomes?".

Thirdly, it is asked: "Are there are any differences or similarities in the competencies envisaged in the achievement of the literacy outcomes and the literacy roles or practices suggested in the Four Resources Model of Freebody and Luke (1990)?"

## **6. Significance of the study**

Since the implementation of OBE, there has been much emphasis on ensuring that the teachers understand what is entailed in each of the learning areas and how to plan the content of the learning programmes according to the expected outcomes. After the initial training period, the teachers were expected to plan programmes for literacy, numeracy and life skills and to adapt their classroom practices towards the achievement of the intended outcomes. However, it is a concern that there are currently no formal structures in place to observe and monitor the classroom literacy practices of teachers or to critically evaluate exactly what *is* happening in classrooms during literacy teaching time and to determine whether the learners are progressing as expected. This study provides the opportunity for in-depth observation of the practical implementability of the planned learning programme of a Grade One teacher, within the realities of the learning environment.

This study will provide an opportunity to determine whether this specific teacher is following the professional advice that theorists, policy developers and curriculum developers have given her and how informed she is in order to apply that knowledge in the classroom learning situation. While this case study approach does not necessarily provide results that

can be generalized, it provides in-depth insight into how one Grade One teacher has responded to curriculum changes.

## **7. Research orientation**

The study will examine whether the teacher is mediating literacy learning within a particular understanding that foregrounds some aspects of literacy, but neglects other literacy practices, or whether the literacy practices of the teacher are sufficient to make sense of and respond effectively to a wide range of texts, as intended by the literacy outcomes of the South African curriculum.

The study will analyse the type of literacy practices offered to the learners in the classroom and the nature of the classroom interactions. The teaching strategies applied during literacy teaching will be investigated and the research will establish whether she is initiating the learners into an adequate understanding of literacy, that will equip them for the complex literacy demands of our changing and diverse society.

This investigation intends to determine whether the teacher understands literacy as a social practice. This would entail investigating whether the teacher acknowledges and incorporates the learners' everyday acts of speaking and reading into the literacy learning activities in the classroom. It would also determine whether the teacher only focuses on skills development or whether she has added other dimensions to the teaching of literacy.

The study attempts to understand the New Literacy Studies argument for the teaching of literacy practices that will enable the learner to deal with texts in a broad range of social contexts. It will emphasize that, although learning the basic skills with the focus on coding and semantic competence, is a requisite for effective literacy learning and should no doubt be taught, it is not sufficient to respond effectively to the literacy required in particular real life contexts.

## **8. Thesis direction**

Chapter One has given an overview of the study, along with the background, the research questions and an outline of the significance of the study. Chapter Two will outline the theoretical and methodological considerations that will be used to ground the analysis and the discussion of the study. Chapter Three describes the current curriculum context of this investigation and will further determine whether any relationship exists between the practices embedded in the current literacy outcomes and the curriculum and pedagogy that are suggested by the socio-cultural literacy model of Freebody and Luke (1990). Chapter Four analyses the classroom observational data to determine the nature of a Grade One teacher's literacy programme and the teaching strategies currently used in her classroom. The findings from this analysis are discussed within the context of the literacy outcomes and the Luke and Freebody model. Chapter Five will draw points from the discussion to conclude whether the current literacy practices in the classroom are aligned to what is intended by the outcomes specified in the new curriculum. Recommendations will be made as to how to adapt the programme content and teaching strategies, to ensure learner achievement in Grade One, as intended by the S.A. literacy outcomes.

## **Chapter Two**

### **1. Theoretical and methodological considerations**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

The teacher remains at the heart of the teaching process, as the one who plans, structures and presents the content and the one who decides on the method of literacy instruction. In my capacity as curriculum advisor, I observed that a large number of Grade One teachers hold conflicting views on how literacy should be taught in the first years of schooling. While the traditional approach focuses on skills development, contemporary approaches advocate language and literacy practices that reflect a socially constructed model of learning and knowledge. The latter emphasizes interaction through language, between the learners and their cultural worlds, in as well as outside the classroom.

#### **1.2 Boundaries of the theoretical framework**

The context of the South African Outcomes-based curriculum that is currently used in Grade One classes and my recent studies of literacy development, have directed my focus towards theories related to the social traditions of the New Literacy Studies (NLS): Gee (1996), Street (1995), Lankshear (1998) and New London Group (1996). The NLS acknowledges the complex, socio-cultural nature of literacy and the implications that such complexity has for classroom practice. The NLS does not see the acquisition of skills as the point of departure for literacy learning, but argues that the activities of reading, writing and speaking occur in a particular way within specific social practices (Street, 1984). This is a contemporary view of literacy that highlights the importance of context, which emphasizes the fact that literacy can be viewed differently in different contexts and different times.

The theories that underpin this study of literacy pedagogy, are complex and varied. Certain theoretical resources have been identified from this body of work in literacy studies that are significant and relevant to this study in particular and I will describe below, those associated with a socio-cultural perspective of literacy learning. Theoretical perspectives

from the NLS, developmental theory, interaction theories and the theory of Comprehension Hypothesis, included in this chapter, support a particular set of literacy practices or pedagogies that will be used to develop a meaningful analysis and discussion of the classroom data in this study. A socio-cultural approach considers the learners' social and cultural backgrounds and uses this knowledge in appropriate activities that will assist the learners' understanding in the classroom.

This report is based on a socio-cultural orientation to the study of literacy learning and instruction and draws on compatible socio-constructivist and dialogic perspectives (Gee 1996, Vygotsky 1978 and Bakhtin 1981). These perspectives were selected because they acknowledge that both the social context for learning and the interactions of teachers and learners, shape what is understood and learned in literacy. If the goal is to change literacy learning, the quality of the pedagogical interactions needs to change, but such interactions should not be treated as simply technical or didactic processes.

### **1.2.1 A socio-cultural perspective**

A socio-cultural perspective of literacy suggests that reading and writing, whether in the first or second language, involves more than the simple decoding and coding of texts. A socio-cultural approach to literacy does not deny the importance of coding and decoding texts, but places that particular skill in the context of the everyday experiences of interacting with others. Literacy is seen as a complex social practice which is learnt through dialogue and apprenticeship in specific communities. In addition to coding and decoding, this perspective on literacy highlights how people make meaning of their everyday literacy experiences in their different cultural contexts. Literacy instruction in the classroom may be viewed as a process of apprenticeship, where the teacher acts as a facilitator and expert, and guides learners into the discourses and social practices of their literate communities. In the initial stages of schooling, the young learner might not be able to complete tasks independently. The teacher will then assist and scaffold instruction for the learner, in order to develop his/her skills of speaking, reading and writing,

The socio-cultural orientation addresses the role of context, as increasingly important in educational research and theory building. Socio-cultural theorists believe that we are all

social beings from birth and that our thoughts and language develop through social interaction. Both thoughts and language are constructed through mediated social interactions in the broader, social, cultural and historical contexts within which we exist. This view provides a theoretical framework to examine the nature of classroom discourse and the important role it serves in teaching and learning literacy within the context of the schools (Wells, 1999 ; Gee, 1996 and Tharpe and Gallimore, 1988).

Gee (1996) provides a socio-cultural definition of literacy in relation to discourses. Discourses are socially recognized ways of using language and interacting in relation to people and objects, so that they can be seen as being part of a specific social group. Gee distinguishes between primary Discourse and secondary Discourse. Primary Discourse relates to how we learn to do and be in our families. Secondary Discourses are the specific forms of communication appropriate to schools, churches, workplaces and other institutional settings. According to Gee (1990), each individual may encounter and participate in a number of discourses every day, using language in a very specific way, to signal that one is playing a socially meaningful role in that setting.

According to Gee (1992), people in social groups think, speak and write for different functions and in their specific discourses. Literacy is seen as a social skill involving discourses, which is developed through participation. A good part of the knowledge resides not only in the mind of the learners, but in the social practices of the groups to which they belong. Gee (1990) has demonstrated that literacy is a complex social practice, as it is integrated with everyday or specialized practices that involve talk, interaction, values and beliefs. He has added that literacy is not always acquired by explicit instruction, but that learners learn through apprenticeship and guided and unguided participation, where they are involved in social practices with people who have already mastered the process (Gee, 1990).

Another area of research that relates to literacy pedagogy in classrooms and the socio-cultural perspective, is the acknowledgement of the knowledge capital of learners when they start formal school. Anne Haas Dyson (1989; 1997) has conducted years of research on children's literacy learning in poor and diverse areas of San Francisco and the Bay area. She elaborated on the value of the literacy knowledge gained at home and in communities for school learning. Dyson (1993) has called on educators to acknowledge the knowledge

that has been acquired through home and other social relationships. Her concerns focus on whether the curriculum provided, allows the home knowledge, language and literacy, to be included and incorporated into the school literate practices. She has found that the children use their resources of everyday life to manage and cope with their school tasks. Dyson (1993) also promoted the concept of a “permeable curriculum”, which indicates the incorporation and application of home and community knowledge into the school curriculum. She recommends that teachers integrate the life experiences of the learners with texts that are used in the classroom, so that the learners’ classroom instructional conversations can be broadened to include a variety of experiences. Freebody, Ludwig and Gunn (1995) conducted another significant study of home and community literacy practices and found that teachers very often do not view the learners’ prior literacy knowledge in a positive way and that the learners experience difficulties in understanding what is expected of them in the classroom. As the spoken language is accepted as the most important medium for teaching and learning, these researchers recommend that more attention be paid to the way in which classroom talk is constructed. They believe that classroom literacy learning could be restricted if the teacher ignores the fact that there is a significant difference in the home language and literacy practices and school language and literacy practices. Teachers should examine whether their classroom talk is explicitly focused on the achievement of the literacy outcomes.

### **1.2.2 Developmental theory**

Vygotsky’s developmental theory (1978) claims that learning awakens a variety of developmental processes that are activated when children interact with people in their environment and in co-operation with peers. There are three central concepts in Vygotsky’s developmental theory that emphasize the importance of social interaction in literacy learning.

#### **a) *The socio-cultural context of knowledge***

Vygotsky emphasizes the important role of culture in influencing how individuals learn and think. His thinking has had a significant impact on research, demonstrating that cognition is “situated” - that the physical and social contexts in which an activity is taking place are integral parts of the learning process. For teachers this means that the



learning that occurs in the classroom will depend on the manner in which certain knowledge and skills are learned and the type of learning environment that is provided for learning. Vygotsky particularly emphasized the role of culture in mediating learning, in providing the tools like words, symbols and signs, through which knowledge is mediated and communicated. Literacy learning and knowledge are to a large extent influenced by cultural and social factors. Vygotsky considers literacy learning to be a culturally and socially mediated process, which reinforces the belief that learners bring from home a particular concept of literacy that was acquired from their family and cultural background. The successful literacy learning of learners therefore depends on making connections between the learners' school learning and their cultural foundations of knowledge.

**b) *The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)***

Learning takes place when children are working within the zone defined by the difference between the learner's performance under two conditions: with assistance and without assistance (Vygotsky, 1978 and Rogoff 1990). Learning and teaching in the ZPD is clearly dependent on social interaction in educational settings, which typifies face-to-face interaction, mediated by speech. In literacy learning, learners are ready to master new concepts or ideas and simply need help from the teacher or their peers to do so - a form of apprenticeship learning. This information is useful for the teacher, as they can apply developmentally appropriate instruction and content, because they know what the learner is capable of at a particular level and also what and when the learner will be able to master new material. According to Vygotskian theory and Rogoff (1990), learners must be challenged with instructional content at higher levels of the learners' learning zone, to activate thinking and learning.

**c) *Scaffolding***

Bruner (1983) defines the term "scaffolding" as guiding children through the zone of proximal development. Scaffolding is understood to be the process of adults providing supportive teaching strategies for learners to gain new knowledge, skills and strategies. The scaffolding process starts with giving the learners a great deal of support during the new learning challenge. This support will be given until they reach the stage where they can successfully complete the tasks independently, and apply their acquired skills in similar tasks on their own.

### 1.2.3 Interaction theory

Bakhtin (1981) emphasizes the socially constructed nature of language. Bakhtin contextualizes the study of language use and development, by seeing language as a means of interaction, influenced by one's cultural context. His theory of dialogism is a way of understanding language as part of a whole, where all the possible meanings of a word interact. Dialogism refers to the context in which an utterance exists and the relationship of one utterance to another. The speech or writing of an individual is an expression of his/her personal values and beliefs, and his/her socio-cultural background.

Lu (1998), drawing from Heath (1983), writes: "... children learn language, be it spoken or written, through the process of socializing in the specific society they are in." According to Heath (1986), the way in which children use language in their home environment can be used to assist their classroom learning. As learning in the classroom is a social activity, I assume that the quality of classroom talk is significantly related to learner achievement in literacy and language. Talk is seen to shape the culture of the classroom and the learning context and directs the learning and the manner in which the learners respond. According to Mehan (1979), conversations in classrooms are examples of the teachers leading and directing the talk, deciding on the turn-taking, evaluating the learners and limiting the discussion or preventing the learners from elaborating on the interpretation of the teacher. Nystrand et al (1997) support Mehan's view and state that the most prevalent form of classroom discourse remains that of teacher initiation, learner response and teacher evaluation. Wells (1999) terms this the IRE pattern of interaction.

Nystrand et al argue for a move away from the monologic pattern described above, to a more interactive pattern that builds on the theory of dialogism. A dialogic perspective is based on the principle that meaning is found not in the text or the individual learner, but that meaning is developed in interaction between an individual and other speakers of a language. They suggest expanded interactive routines that include dialogic conversations, scaffolded instruction and more interactive learning opportunities during literacy instruction.

Nystrand et al (1997) have found that literacy knowledge is largely shaped by the questions teachers ask, the responses they make to the learners and the way in which they structure their literacy activities. According to these studies, classroom discourse is not seen as a

tool to enhance achievement, but merely as a medium for learning in the classroom. It is therefore important for this study to focus on the teacher-and-learner talk during interaction in the literacy classroom.

Nystrand et al (1997) examine classroom interactions to determine the difference between discussion and recitation. The latter occurs when the teacher leads the learners in an exchange of information. The learners are seldom allowed to expand on the discussion or to redirect the conversation away from the intentions of the teacher. Discussion, on the other hand, leads to authentic, open-ended talk, expanding of learners' ideas and comments and weaving them into a broader and richer dialogue. The teachers usually have the ability to either maintain the discussion, by asking further qualifying questions or cut it to a minimum, if they limit answers or disregard the contributions of learners. Due to possible vocabulary limitations, it may be difficult to keep conversations and discussions going in the Grade One classroom, where learners have different cultural and language backgrounds.

#### **1.2.4 The Comprehension Hypothesis**

The diverse language orientations of the learners in this specific classroom lead to the inclusion in this study, of theories that emphasize the provision of learners with interesting comprehensible texts for literacy learning. About a third of the learners in this class were receiving instruction in a language that was not their mother tongue and was very seldom heard or spoken before they started formal schooling. The reality of this situation is that those learners basically had to acquire a second language, which in the end would have to develop into a language of learning for those learners. Krashen's Comprehension Hypothesis (1985) will be included in this framework, as it encompasses the importance of interaction and communication, especially for learners who receive instruction in their second language. Krashen regards communication as the main function of language and focuses on teaching communicative abilities and stresses the importance of vocabulary.

According to Krashen, acquisition requires meaningful interaction in the target language and the best methods are those that supply "comprehensible input" in a less stressful learning environment. He claims that learners acquire language best by understanding

input that is just beyond their existing level of competence, in order to encourage the learners to make an effort to understand. Consequently, sufficient "comprehensible input" should be provided, including listening activities, which are especially important for learners from diverse language backgrounds.

When learners have to learn something new, it does not happen in a vacuum. New learning builds on what the learner already knows. When learning occurs, there is always an influencing factor. This could be the teacher, a book, another learner or a worksheet activity that provides the necessary guidance to the learner. If the learners are presented with new information that they cannot comprehend and no assistance for understanding is provided, the chances are high that those learners will struggle. One of the problems experienced by these learners is limited vocabulary. When learning is a language-based activity, it is fundamentally dependent on vocabulary knowledge. When learners have inadequate vocabulary knowledge, the learning process should include developing sufficient tools to develop and understand new concepts. Through the process of "scaffolding" (Vygotsky, 1978 and Bruner, 1987), the learner will be able to reach a level of understanding that is required for effective learning to take place. The term "scaffolding" is used for interactional support that is often in the form of dialogue between the teacher and the learner, gestures, pictures or any other learning support material.

Au (2001) discusses the concept of culturally responsive instruction in relation to literacy learning. Culturally responsive instruction is a teaching approach that builds on the strengths that learners bring from their home cultures. Learners' from diverse literacy backgrounds deserve to be accommodated within literacy instruction that includes higher level thinking, as well as lower level skills, such as phonics. Au identifies higher-level skills as being the gathering of information from different sources, critical evaluation of information and the application of that information. It is these higher-level skills that will open doors to the larger society and to the future (Au, 2001). If classroom instruction involving learners from diverse backgrounds focuses on lower level skills, it restricts the development of higher level thinking skills. According to Au, culturally responsive instruction can make school literacy learning more meaningful, enjoyable and rewarding for learners from diverse literacy and cultural backgrounds.

Within the scope of this study to determine the nature of the literacy programme, I will examine the type of pedagogic practices that are necessary for the learner to progress successfully in the upper grades and to avoid the "Grade Four slump". This last term is used to describe a noticeable decline in the progress of learners in Grade Four, after they have demonstrated apparently satisfactory progress while in Grades One to Three (Chall et al, 1990). From Grade Four, the academic demands are heavier on learners. They are expected to understand concepts, gather information, summarize content and solve word problems in each learning area in the curriculum. Learners need to master 'academic reading' for effective learning, as comprehension is the basis of learning. This type of reading requires a deeper understanding of the text. Although phonics instruction helps learners to recognize words and sentences, these skills of coding and decoding do not ensure comprehension for learning. This situation highlights the fact that although learners may have good word recognition skills and even have the ability to achieve basic comprehension, they may not necessarily be capable of 'academic reading', i.e. reading to learn.

#### **1.2.5 The Four Resources Model**

As explained previously in Chapter Two, the Four Resources Model of Freebody and Luke (1990), is an important reference that will be used in relation to the South African literacy outcomes to substantiate the findings and recommendations of this study. This model firmly supports the view that literacy is a flexible set of cultural practices that can be changed according to the needs of different cultural interests, institutions and groups (Luke, 1995). Freebody and Luke's model of literacy suggests an interactive approach that involves four elements: the reader, the text, culture and society. It looks beyond the learner and the text in isolation and considers the social and cultural conditions that surround the learner and influence his/her learning in a particular way.

Freebody and Luke describe literacy as practices that learners need to learn in social contexts, but do not concentrate their research on defining the best method of teaching literacy. This model is intended to help educators and learners understand the variety of practices that learners engage in during the transactions between the learner, texts and contexts, in everyday social practices of literacy. It assists teachers in the development of a

range of practices and understandings that the learners can use to meet the literacy demands of the future. Luke and Freebody (1999) argue that a socio-cultural approach to literacy allows us to move away from deficit models that emphasize that certain learners are not able to demonstrate satisfactory levels of literacy and to recognize the diverse, cultural knowledge that learners bring to classrooms. They believe in the importance of making connections between literacies used in the home, texts used in the community and literacies learned in schools.

The Four Resources Model describes the literacy practices that learners learn in school that shape reading and writing differently. Different literacy teaching practices in the classroom construct different literacies. When the teacher uses a critical perspective in the classroom, her instructional methodology will focus on helping the learners to identify how meaning is constructed and how they, as readers, are positioned by various interpretations of those texts. By using this model, the teacher goes beyond teaching literacy skills and extends the learning, by encouraging the learners to think deeply and critically about their reading and do multiple interpretations as they engage with texts.

The model recognizes four necessary practices in which a literacy learner participates, in their social context and in the learning context. Within a text-based environment, these practices will not be individually sufficient for learners to survive the increasing literacy challenges, and they suggest that the learners develop all four practices during literacy learning. According to Freebody and Luke (1990), learners need to develop the following practices to work effectively with a variety of texts with which they will be confronted in the classroom and in society in the future:

**a) *Practices that allow learners to break the code of texts***

The emphasis here is on rules and skills. The learners need to be able to recognize and use fundamental features of texts that include knowledge of the alphabet and sounds in words, the relationship between sounds and letters, spelling and other language structural elements. This practice emphasizes the decoding and encoding of symbols in written, visual and spoken texts and aims to develop vocabulary and grammar knowledge, including punctuation.

**b) *Practices that allow learners to participate in the meanings of texts***

This practice considers the knowledge of a topic that the learner brings to the text. The focus is on constructing meaning from the vocabulary, clauses and sentences used in texts. The learners should know that they can draw on their background and prior knowledge to construct meaning and should learn to compare their own experiences with those in the texts. Learners need to develop competencies in composing written, verbal and visual texts and also need to understand and know what the content of the text means. It is particularly important that learners with limited background knowledge, be afforded the time and sufficient opportunities to develop and practise these competencies

**c) *Practices that allow learners to use texts functionally***

The emphasis here is on understanding the purposes of different texts. Learners need to be aware of the different cultural and social functions that texts can perform in and out of school, and that each text type is differently structured and has different features for particular purposes. Learners need to know the socio-cultural expectations and specific rules associated with the usage of different types of spoken communication and written texts in everyday activities. These include the completion of bank forms, loan contracts, greetings, etc as well as the specific literacy genres of schooling, such as scientific texts, historical writing and literacy texts.

**d) *Practices that allow learners to critically analyse and transform texts***

This highlights the fact that a learner's earliest experiences with literacy, ideas and information are not neutral and can be challenged. The learner needs to acquire the ability to identify the knowledge within the texts, as well as the ideologies and intentions of writers and speakers. The intention here is to make learners aware that texts are written for a very specific purpose - to influence readers in some way or other. Learners must know that as readers they have the right to position themselves and present alternative thoughts around texts. Learners must be able to engage in the practices of critical reading, writing and speaking.

Freebody and Luke (1990) state that each of the suggested practices in this model needs to be developed in order to achieve effective levels of literacy, as each practice on its own will not be sufficient for a learner to become adequately literate, according to the demands

of this changing society. This model offers a range of literacy experiences and can be used to accommodate the diverse needs of the learners in the classroom. The teacher can choose from a range of practices, to produce a very specific literate competency that needs to be developed in the learner.

These theories will underpin the investigation and the discussion of the results generated by the data.

## **2. Research Methodology**

This case study will focus on the discourses and social practices that a teacher is making available for the Grade One learners within the classroom context. In the classroom observations, close attention will be paid to the type of activities and the interactions between the learners and the teacher.

### **2.1 Choice of research instruments**

A qualitative case study method was used as the basis of the investigation (Merriam, 1988). The purpose of this case study was to provide a rich, intensive description and detailed information of a single, authentic and contemporary entity, namely the classroom teacher and the phenomena surrounding it, in this case, the learners in the classroom environment. This case study involves the three principles of describing, understanding and explaining and therefore, qualifies as qualitative research (Tellis, 1997). All observations are derived from the participants' behaviour, as well as the context of the classroom environment, which could have affected the literacy learning that occurred at that specific time.

Before access could be gained to the school, written permission had to be granted by the Western Cape Education Department, the principal and the teacher. This permission was granted on the conditions of confidentiality and an agreement to share the findings of the study with the Western Cape Education Department at the end of the research project.



## **2.2 Researcher perspectives**

As the researcher, my experiences in education over the past thirty years will undoubtedly influence the design, implementation and interpretation of this study. I am a former Grade One teacher and before this investigation I had just completed the coursework of a post-graduate degree in literacy studies. I have brought to this study a firm understanding and years of experience of reading instruction and working with struggling learners of disadvantaged communities. Four years of experience as a curriculum advisor in Grades One to Three, have given me a clear understanding of the South African Outcomes-based curriculum and the implementation challenges that face the teachers in the classroom of learners with diverse language and literacy needs. Numerous classroom visits to support the teachers in the implementation of the curriculum since 1998, have equipped me to provide a realistic, qualitative description and analysis of the study.

## **2.3 The current South African curriculum context**

At the time of performing the classroom observations for this study, the literacy learning programme described seven outcomes which the learners had to achieve successfully at the end of nine years of schooling. These outcomes were the same from Grade One to Grade Nine, with progressive levels of complexity. At the time of gathering data through observation, the Grade One teachers were in their fifth year of implementing the outcomes-based curriculum and planning their literacy programmes towards the achievement of the seven literacy outcomes.

## **2.4 Participants**

The main participants were a Grade One classroom teacher with forty-six learners, aged between five-and-a-half and seven. The school was chosen specifically because it accommodated learners from diverse social, cultural and economic backgrounds. The school also attracted learners from different language backgrounds and the mediums of instruction were English and Afrikaans. Although the learners were neatly dressed in their

school uniforms, a large number of learners came from poverty-stricken areas. Throughout the investigation, an average of three learners were absent on any given day.

The teacher, a female with twelve years of teaching experience in the primary school, of which the last three years had been spent teaching Grade One learners, was confident and had a very positive attitude. The case presented here, focused on this specific teacher who had fluent language abilities and experience in teaching a class of learners of diverse language backgrounds. The language of learning and teaching in this classroom was English. There were a number of learners whose home language was different from the language of teaching and learning. The parents of these learners preferred that their children be instructed in English, although the teacher had explained the risks involved. The learners represented a balanced mix across gender, but were on different levels with regard to their literacy abilities. The teacher claimed that her attempts at trying new approaches to teaching had produced good results over the last few years. The teacher had high expectations of the learners, motivated and applauded their efforts. It was evident that they respected her.

## **2.5 The setting**

### **2.5.1 School environment**

The school is classified as a parallel-medium school, with each grade having an English-medium and Afrikaans-medium class. The school is situated in a residential area classified as previously disadvantaged. Unemployment is rife in the school feeder area and this impacts negatively on the school finances and the provision of resources to learners and teachers. The financial situation of the school limits the availability of funds for additional teachers for Xhosa-teaching or computer-based education. The teachers are forced to create a learning environment with limited basic learning materials. All the teachers in the school share technological resources like computers, televisions and tape recorders.

### **2.5.2 Classroom environment**

The teacher in this classroom is described as hardworking, dedicated and reliable. Although the classroom space is limited due to the large number of learners, the teacher has managed to create a print-rich environment and a comfortable atmosphere for teaching and learning. The purpose of the classroom observation sessions was to gather information with regard to the nature of the teacher's classroom literacy practices, the instructional strategies used and the interaction between the teacher and the learners during the literacy session. The duration of the daily literacy session was one-and-a-half-hours, with a standard time-slot directly after the first break every day.

## **2.6 Data collection methods and procedures**

The primary means of data collection consisted of classroom observations over a period of five weeks. The observations were conducted once a week during the months of May and June. This period of the year marked the end of the first six months of the Grade One learners in the formal school context and it could be viewed as the most appropriate time to gauge the literacy development of the learners since the beginning of the year. During this five-week period, the teacher worked within a specific theme [e.g. Animals], as suggested in the outcomes-based curriculum. Data was gathered throughout the course of the development of the theme, from its initial stages, right up to the end of its application.

While collecting the data, I started as a passive observer, sitting on the side of the classroom, with a writing pad for informal written observations and a tape recorder. It soon became evident that I could not assume a completely passive stance, as the learners may have perceived it as disinterest. A marginal degree of interaction was also necessary in order to clarify uncertainties with the participants.

A combination of audiotaped conversations and informal field notes were used to create detailed accounts of the classroom interactions, procedures and the classroom setting. There were a few opportunities to do informal interviewing concerning significant literacy events where clarification and explanations were needed from the teacher, as to the reasons for her actions or decisions.

## **2.7 Data capturing and editing procedure**

The observations recorded the classroom environment, social climate and interactions between the teacher and the learners during literacy activities and events. Through the process of audiotaping, it was possible to record most of the verbal interactions. The classroom observations were structured around capturing the nature of the talk and the procedures that were followed during literacy instruction time. The activities recorded included the nature of the discussions, phonics instruction, reading instruction and auditory exercises, with the intention of developing learners' listening skills.

Special attention was paid to what was said in the classroom and the procedures that were followed during the literacy session. I attempted to transcribe the verbalizations verbatim, in order to best capture the language usage and the responses of the teacher and the learner. During the periods of observation, descriptions of the classroom setting, the course of activities and, in particular, the literacy interaction between the teacher and the learners were recorded informally in field notes.

## **2.8 Data analysis procedure**

The verbatim transcripts of the classroom observations, together with the informal field notes have been analysed within the conceptual framework that was introduced at the beginning of this chapter. The literacy activities, the teaching strategies and interaction patterns were examined and questions and response patterns were evaluated. Through the analysis of the data, it was possible to gauge the typical elements of the literacy pedagogy that was currently used in this specific Grade One classroom.

Within the context of the literacy outcomes, the analysis focuses on:

1. the nature of the literacy activities
2. the focus of and the nature of the teacher talk
3. the interactional patterns between the teachers and learners

The transcribed conversations were separated into meaningful units that represent particular aspects of literacy teaching. Each monologue within these segments is

numbered for ease of reference. Italicised lines preceded by the letter 'T' indicate the teacher's vocalizations, the letter 'L' indicates those of the learners. All comments in square brackets within the excerpt refer to actions accompanying the conversation or other useful observations. The segments were then examined more deeply using the earlier mentioned theories of literacy learning. The observational data of these particular segments were used to construct a set of conclusions about the current literacy pedagogy used by the teacher in this specific classroom context.

## **2.9 Limitations of methodology**

The results of this investigation should be interpreted in the light of several limitations. This investigation was conceptualized, implemented and interpreted, to a certain extent, in the light of my own beliefs as an educator, curriculum advisor and as researcher. Although it is acknowledged that all research is essentially subjective, every attempt has been made to minimize any bias in the analysis of data.

It is also acknowledged that the presence of another person in the classroom over an extended period of time may have influenced the learners' and the teacher's responses. Not only did the learners have to deal with an additional adult, but I may also have been seen by the teacher to be there in the capacity of critic.

In this chapter, the theories have been described that are applicable to this study, bearing in mind that this teacher is teaching literacy within a specific outcomes-based framework. A qualitative study was found to be the most suitable methodology to use for this case study. The Grade One class in this particular school, was chosen because they experience the realities that schools and teachers are faced with in our current teaching environment.

## **Chapter 3**

### **1. The South African literacy outcomes in relation to the Four Resources Model of Freebody and Luke**

This chapter will discuss the literacy learning outcomes in the South African Outcomes-based curriculum and how it relates to the Four Resources Model of Freebody and Luke (1990), as background to the data analysis that will be done in Chapter Four.

Since the implementation of Outcomes-based education in South African Grade One classes in 1998, teachers have been mandated to guide and assist learners in the development of the skills, knowledge and values that are described in the specific literacy outcomes. The literacy outcomes embedded in the South African Outcomes-based curriculum, hope to promote the type of instruction that will meet the needs of all learners, including those with diverse language and cultural orientations. In the description of the outcomes, the term “text” refers to any form of spoken, written or visual communication and it is emphasized that texts should always be interpreted within a specific context or contexts (Western Cape Education Department Policy Document, October 1997, pp. 29-30).

The Four Resources Model of Freebody and Luke (1990), as explained in Chapter Two, will be used to create a more suitable context for literacy learning and to further direct this discussion. This model is seen as an inclusive and dynamic framework for understanding literacy as a social-cultural practice, combining different components of literacy and introducing them in an integrated manner.

There are currently seven South African literacy outcomes that direct and guide teachers' classroom literacy practice. These outcomes are designed to develop a literate learner who is able to understand and make meaning of texts, create and interact with a variety of texts, develop and apply language structures and conventions, communicate effectively in a specific context, access information from texts and respond critically to texts. These

competencies must be developed in order to ensure lifelong learning for sustainable development.

In this chapter, the formal description of each outcome, as stated in the Western Cape Education Department policy document (October, 1997), will be unpacked. The literacy competencies that the learner needs to develop will be identified and discussed in relation to the literacy practices that are described in the Four Resources Model of Freebody and Luke (1990) - the practices or roles of code breaker, text participant, text user and of text analyst.

**" Outcome 1. Learners make and negotiate meaning and understanding**

Meaning is central to communication. This specific outcome aims at the development of a learner's ability to understand, create and negotiate meaning in various contexts, by using appropriate communication strategies and by using listening, speaking, observing, reading, signing and writing skills. These strategies and skills are developed and refined by constantly being exposed to a variety of situations which afford language users opportunities to interact in different ways."

[Source: Western Cape Education Department Policy Document (October 1997), p. 33]

This description clearly emphasizes how important it is for learners to understand and make meaning when they are exercising the different literacy skills of listening, viewing, speaking, reading and writing. Learners must have the opportunities to interact with other language users in a variety of contexts and texts. In these contexts, the learners should be involved in practices where the traditional skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing, as well as observing and 'signing', can be developed, with the emphasis on making meaning. The skills of decoding cannot be ignored or neglected when this outcome is

developed, as the learner will need phonics knowledge and phonemic awareness to understand and cope with any reading or writing of texts.

There is an emphasis on a variety of texts and contexts, with 'text' being used broadly to cover a range of print and non-media print. The learners, who may be from diverse social and language backgrounds and their existing knowledge capital, must also be seen as an appropriate resource and context. At a later stage, the teacher could add unfamiliar contexts and texts to expand the knowledge base of the learners.

When correctly interpreted by the teacher, this outcome will focus literacy teaching strongly on meaning-making. The need to develop skills of meaning-making corresponds with the suggested semantic practice in the literacy model of Freebody and Luke (1990). They agree that it is important for the learner to develop a deep understanding of the meanings embodied in texts. It is important that the learners be aware that they can bring meaning to the text. Grade One learners have knowledge capital that they have learned within their immediate social and cultural groups, through the process of interaction with family and friends. As soon as they enter the classroom, their interaction group expands to include other learners and the educators, who could be from different backgrounds. As they are introduced to classroom discourse and learning, they are exposed to and learn to respect and acknowledge the diverse language orientations of the other learners. At first, each learner will express himself/herself in his/her mother tongue during classroom conversations. According to Morrow and Gambrell (2000), the learners in a Grade One classroom could be on different levels of meaning-making, vocabulary development and conceptual understanding, depending on how much they had been read to and other literacy experiences prior to entering school.

According to Freebody and Luke (1990), learners must be able to make meaning of all types of texts that they encounter in their everyday lives. They believe that to participate effectively in texts, the learners need assistance in understanding spoken, written, visual and other texts, read and view texts until they reach the stage where they can create and read texts independently. The assistance and support to the learner draw on Vygotsky's (1978) notion of the Zone of Proximal Development and scaffolding. The scaffold is the environment that the teacher creates, the instructional support and the processes and language that are taught to the learner in the context of approaching a task and developing



the abilities to meet it. Vygotskian theory shows that learning starts with what is near to the learners' experience and progresses to what is further from their experience - in other words, from the known to the unknown. It is necessary that learners and educators together undertake the building of scaffolding through dialogue, using language within their "ZPD" until the learners can work independently.

The choice of texts and contexts can limit the learners' literacy learning and understanding. When the teacher uses a familiar text as a resource, the learners will have sufficient vocabulary to have a rich and extended conversation with their peers and could in such a way broaden their understanding of the topic. Learners bring important knowledge and skills to a text. Greater learner involvement allows the learners to connect their own experiences to the new concepts, to internalize the meanings of these concepts, thereby developing deeper conceptual understandings.

The learners must be made aware of the importance of developing reading as a life skill and be encouraged to read a variety of texts as often as possible. Braunger and Lewis (1997) maintain that learners need regular practice in reading for meaning and for authentic purposes. Reading assists understanding and reading with understanding enables the learner to learn new knowledge. It must be apparent to the learners that their social and cultural knowledge is acknowledged and respected and that each of their contributions during discussions can add value to the classroom learning.

### **"Outcome 2. Learners show a critical awareness of language usage**

This specific outcome aims to develop a learner's understanding of the way in which language is used as a powerful instrument to reflect, shape and manipulate people's beliefs, actions and relationships. The complexity and sensitivity of a multilingual context specifically requires the development of a learner's skills to interpret and consciously reflect on how language is used. For this reason the development of the decoding skills (reading, listening and observing) is emphasised."

[Source: Western Cape Education Department Policy Document (October 1997),  
p. 37]

This particular outcome requires that the learners develop the skill of carefully observing, listening and focusing on all types of texts, the language used in the text, as well as what the writer or speaker's purpose was in creating the text. Social and cultural contexts shape texts and determine the values that underlie the text. The learners should be able to critically analyse any text that they are confronted with and confidently challenge the language usage in the text. Should the learners in a classroom have diverse backgrounds and social experiences, each of them would bring their own interpretations to a specific text. The intention of this outcome is to make learners aware of the power of language. Young learners begin to learn a language mainly through listening. The learner is expected to apply the different skills of observing, listening, speaking and reading, to effectively develop this particular outcome. Listening, viewing and speaking involve thinking, understanding and reasoning. Further development of this outcome will also require that the learners be able to decode words, in order to recognize words while reading and analysing texts.

The expectations of the outcome agree with the text analyst role that Freebody and Luke (1990) suggest is essential for learners to be classified as literate, from a New Literacy Studies perspective. Whether text is visual, written or spoken, it has the potential to emit a powerful message to the reader or listener. It is important to bear in mind that this outcome suggests that the learner, as a reader of texts, also needs to be able to decode and comprehend texts. According to Freebody and Luke (1990), learners need to do more than recognize and understand the words in the text. Teachers should have critical conversations and discussions with young learners. Vivian Vasquez (2000), a kindergarten educator, realized that her learners were bringing texts that they were really interested in, to the classroom. These included popular culture like television and video texts. She realized how important it was to include those types of texts, to make her learners aware of the underlying issues within those texts, in her teaching of literacy. This enabled her to highlight topical issues of gender equity, human rights, values, race, class and religion, in visual, spoken and written texts, from this very early stages of the learners' literacy development.

To be a successful text analyst, the learner needs to understand how texts are created according to the perspectives and interests of a writer. Freebody and Luke (1990) remind us that a writer of any text writes the text for a specific audience and is able to manipulate the content of the text for that audience. The text writer writes the text in a specific manner, because he or she has a very specific purpose in mind with that text. Depending on the purpose of the text, the writer would deliberately use a certain opinion, bias or points of view in his/her writing, because the intention is to influence the reader.

Literacy should become a cultural resource for learners. When learners become successful text analysts, they will deliberately be looking at the manner in which language is being used, which linguistic devices have been used to construct meaning, what the agenda of the author could be and evaluate the text accordingly. A critical reader is informed enough to identify stereotyping and be aware of social equity and social justice within texts. To reach a successful text-analyst-level of literacy, learners will have to move beyond reading for enjoyment, or comprehension, although these are still important.

Research (Freebody et al, 1995) suggests that to create opportunities for the development of this role, a larger variety of texts such as news reports, character descriptions, posters, report cards, drama activities, discussions, text comparisons and viewing activities should be used in the classroom. The educator needs to make provision in her planning of the lesson to look at the texts critically and inform the learners that it is possible for each of them to interpret the text differently. The learners should then be given the opportunity to analyse the texts and focus on the use of certain words or issues of concern. This approach to text analysis will enhance meaning-making and open up the text for further investigation and discussion. Effective application of this literacy practice will depend on the type of questions that the teacher would put to the learners and whether the learners would be allowed to debate the text content. This point highlights the important role that the educator can play in determining activities that can extend the scope of learners' literacy learning. They play a pivotal role in directing the literacy experience into an effective critical thinking direction, at a very early stage of formal schooling, to create a much more productive learning experience for the learners. The teacher needs to bear in mind that the skills of decoding and meaning-making must not be neglected when she plans activities to develop this outcome in the learners.

At the same time, the learners at the receiving end of the text must know that they have the right to question any texts that they are confronted with, and that as critical readers, they have a choice to be influenced or indoctrinated by the text or not. Although this competency is initially developed as a literacy skill, it later becomes an empowering life skill that can be applied effectively in everyday situations.

**“Outcome 3. Learners respond to the aesthetic, affective, cultural and social values in texts**

The aim of this outcome is to develop a learner's appreciation, use and creation of text as an artistic expression of thoughts, feelings, attitudes and values through exposure to a wide range of genres. The development of learners' listening, reading and viewing skills to recognise and use literary devices enriches the language use and the quality of their language use and lives."

[Source: Western Cape Education Department Policy Document (October 1997), p. 41]

The description of this outcome points to the importance of texts in the process of learning. In order to develop this outcome, the curriculum suggests that the learners be exposed to a variety of texts of a literary nature, through listening to and reading of texts. It implies the need for learners to be exposed to the manner in which texts are constructed, with a focus on stylistic devices and design grammar that are found in certain kinds of texts. Suitable texts for the development of this outcome would be stories, rhymes, poems and songs. Listening to stories, rhymes and poems thus becomes an important activity in the Grade One class, as the learners learn how different texts are structured and how they develop appropriate vocabulary. Attention should also be given to the effect of texts on the reader's emotions, knowledge and relationships. It is expected that the teachers expose the learners to these texts, allow the learners to experience the effect of the texts and later guide the learners to share their opinions about the text. When the learners are exposed to

different texts, they become more aware of and able to recognize the design grammar of texts. As they experience these literary styles, they will be affected by the text in some way and that leads them to forming opinions of the texts. The development of this outcome is a process, where the learners are eventually expected to look critically at texts and learn that they should respect the opinion of others. In order to achieve this outcome, the Grade One learner must be able to view, listen to and read texts with understanding, in order to respond accordingly. While developing the skill of independent reading with understanding, the learner will also develop and consolidate his/her decoding and word recognition skills. He/she will begin to recognize familiar words in the environment and in picture books with simple texts, which will later extend to include more complex texts.

When correctly interpreted by the teacher, this outcome will focus literacy teaching on the analysis of texts. The development of the learners' skill of analysis is related to the text analyst role described in the model of Freebody and Luke (1990). They emphasize that this competency can effectively be developed in very young learners, provided that appropriate texts are used. Suitable texts for young learners will include visual or simple written texts about familiar content. The response of the learners will depend on their literacy experiences, which includes their exposure to popular culture like television stories, video films and games.

The first three literacy practices suggested by Freebody and Luke (1990) could produce a reader who will recognize, understand and accept a text without questioning or debating the content or ever realizing the impact that a specific text could have on a reader. Their fourth suggested practice, on the other hand, that of text analyst, is aimed at developing a learner who is able to respond effectively to a wide range of texts. It is in the interest of the learner to know that texts need not be accepted as they are presented and that as a learner they are entitled to have an opinion of a text. When this outcome is achieved, the learner is expected to make judgements about the value of the information and the nature of the text. This outcome intends to provide young learners with the tools to question and critique a range of written and spoken texts, so that they may eventually understand the power that texts have to influence a particular set of values and beliefs.

**“Outcome 4. Learners access, process and use information from a variety of sources and situations**

This specific outcome aims to develop the capacity of learners to function fully in modern society by finding, evaluating and using information. The development of information skills is indispensable for the attainment of quality lifelong learning.”

[Source: Western Cape Education Department Policy Document (October 1997), p. 44]

The description of this outcome emphasizes how important it is for young learners to develop the capacity to gather information from different sources for learning and how texts can be used as resources. Learners also need to become accustomed to the many ways in which different types of texts or literacy genres can function for various purposes. It is understood that as an active participant in the process of learning, learners will need information and be expected to find information from available sources. This outcome expects the learners to understand what is meant by a source and attempts to develop the capacity of the learner to select which is the most suitable from a variety of available sources, like books, magazines, newspapers and catalogues. They should also be taught how to locate those sources in the classroom, the school building and outside of the school grounds. This outcome is important, since the knowledge and skills that are developed, will be essential for future learning and researching relevant information that the learners will need for projects and assignments. Visual texts, like drawings and pictures appeal to the young learner and therefore, the Grade One teacher can use a variety of pictures on familiar and later unfamiliar topics in magazines and story books very effectively to activate the skill of using texts to find relevant information in the classroom.

When correctly understood by the teacher, the classroom literacy teaching will need to be geared towards the development of information skills. This could be viewed as a new skill, but what it entails is the practice of paging through magazines for pictures that are needed for a specific project, finding information in textbooks or looking up words in the dictionary.

These activities have been part of the experience of Grade One learners in regular classroom literacy practice, but the learners were never explicitly taught the specific procedures involved in the development of these information skills. This outcome describes very definite skills that the learners have to develop in the process of finding information. In the development of this outcome, learners are required to be actively involved in the process of finding and using information within the classroom. Eventually, the learner will extend this knowledge to sources beyond the school context and into their homes and communities.

Freebody and Luke (1990) suggest a similar literacy practice that is necessary to function effectively in society, namely the text user practice. As a text user, the learner develops the competency to use written, spoken and visual texts in different ways and for different cultural and social purposes. This competency highlights the fact that a text can be fully utilized, whether it be for enjoyment, to reflect on social issues or personal issues or to collect information, as envisaged in Outcome Four. The learner gets to understand that certain texts are used for specific purposes and that each text type has characteristic structures and features. They learn to understand that there are alternative ways in which texts can be used to convey specific messages effectively. Learners need to be aware that literacy learning goes beyond the recognition of and the meaning-making of a text. They should also be aware of the procedures necessary to participate in and apply texts for particular academic purposes, as well as in their everyday lives. Outcome Four creates the opportunity for learners to develop the procedural skills to access information for lifelong learning.

**“Outcome 5. Learners understand, know and apply language structures and conventions in context**

This specific outcome aims to develop a language user's understanding and knowledge of grammar. The development of this grammatical competence empowers the learner to communicate clearly and confidently by using grammatical structures (e.g. word order) correctly. Clarity of communication is improved through the development of a learner's editing skills, which includes a conscious awareness of the learner's own language usage.”

[Source: Western Cape Education Department Policy Document (October 1997), p. 48]

The description of this outcome focuses literacy teaching on the development of the learners' grammatical knowledge necessary for verbal and written communication. When we consider the different ways in which learners use texts in their everyday interactions in life, we realize the importance of grammatical knowledge.

The first aspect that learners need for effective verbal communication, is vocabulary knowledge in order to speak and to understand that which they hear. According to Armbruster et al (2001), the more opportunities are created for young learners to listen to and to be actively involved in conversations, the more words they will learn and understand. The American National Reading Panel Report (2000) recognizes vocabulary knowledge as critically important in any speaking and reading exercise. If any verbal or written text is within the learners' vocabulary range, the learner will be able to understand the text. The larger the vocabulary of the learners, the easier it will be for the learner to understand the text on condition that the text is developmentally appropriate for the learners. It is important that the learners' interests and prior vocabulary experiences be taken into consideration in the choice of texts for interaction in literacy learning. The learners will then be able to use their existing knowledge to make meaning, providing the basis for the extension and enrichment of their vocabulary knowledge. Storybook reading and the retelling of learners' experiences provide suitable and appropriate contexts for the



teaching of new grammatical knowledge such as vocabulary, word formation, word order and other conventions. Armbruster et al (2001) are of the opinion that when children learn new words, they need to be provided with instruction over a longer period of time, so that they will be able to use the words effectively in future. The more the learners work with specific words, the better they seem to learn them.

Other important sources for learner vocabulary development are conversations with adults, the variety of extensive reading activities that happens in the classroom, and the conscious emphasis on the words that are used to convey particular meanings (Armbruster et al, 2001). As the learners develop knowledge of grammatical structures and conventions, they are expected to apply that knowledge in the creation of written texts. The creation of texts includes exercises where the learners are given opportunities to complete sentences and to correctly structure and sequence words in sentences. Pressley (2000) agrees that the learners will not be able to write and understand the words if they cannot read the words. In order to write and read the words, the learners have to be aware of the letters and sounds represented by the letters. Thus, phonics knowledge is necessary for word recognition that will eventually facilitate the writing of texts in a literacy instructional programme.

This outcome also aims to create regular opportunities for learners to work with texts and to develop the ability to recognize and to rectify language errors, such as tense errors, spelling errors, lack of punctuation and incomplete sentences. Initially Grade One learners will experiment with using written symbols to produce sentences, stories and messages, but later in the developmental process they will create texts, correctly using punctuation and upper-case and lower-case letters.

When interpreted by the educator, this outcome will focus on the development of the ability to use grammar correctly in the structure of words and sentences in speaking and writing. The development of this outcome will therefore include identifying the codes and conventions of written and spoken texts. It also entails the understanding of the purposes of different texts, as these shape the way in which texts are structured and formed.

The coding and meaning-making competencies suggested by the model of Freebody and Luke (1990) are linked to this outcome. They agree that learners have to know about the structure of the written or spoken text, as it entails the actual words used and the manner in

which the words are arranged and sequenced. When learners work with a text, it is important for them to understand its context, which includes the type of text and its purpose. At the same time, they must have the knowledge and strategies to work with the text and be able to understand the grammar and the structural conventions in texts. To be a successful reader and writer, the learner must be able to understand the nature of the relationship that exists between the spoken sounds in the language and the codes and symbols that are used to represent those sounds in written texts. To develop this role successfully, it is necessary that the learners engage with a whole range of texts that they can identify with and that deal with familiar issues. Learners need to understand the purposes of different written, visual and spoken texts and that the different text types have different conventions. Stories, diaries, letters, instructions and videos can be used effectively for this purpose.

It is equally important for the learners to understand the message that written, spoken and visual texts are trying to convey to them. Learners should be given sufficient opportunities to listen to stories that are read out loud by the teacher. It is important that the different experiences and knowledge brought to the literacy experience by the learners, be acknowledged by the teacher and be used in the classroom. If teachers are aware of learners' prior knowledge, they can scaffold their learning more effectively. The teacher's instructional support will enable the learners to make the link between their own background knowledge and that which is found in the text. This understanding will further allow the learners to compare their own experiences with that of the text and eventually debate issues that they have encountered in the text.

#### **“Outcome 6. Learners use language for learning**

This specific outcome aims to develop the learner's ability to use language as a tool for learning in all learning areas. Learning is mediated through language as the learner interacts with new knowledge, materials, peers, teachers and other people. The intrinsic value of language as a tool for problem-solving, decision-making, and creative, critical and evaluative thinking should be developed across the curriculum. The role of language in cognitive and conceptual development

should furthermore be reflected in and promoted by the total school environment."

[Source: Western Cape Education Department Policy Document (October 1997), p. 51]

The description of this outcome intends to emphasize the importance of learners developing their skills and knowledge in the language that is used for teaching and learning across the curriculum. Learners need adequate knowledge of the language and conceptual understanding in order to engage effectively in different learning areas of the curriculum. For learners to interact with and learn new knowledge, they need language to perform other cognitive tasks while they make sense of the different texts. During learning, the learners will be expected to take part in discussions, to solve problems, and to do experiments, projects and assignments of a practical and written nature. When the learners are confronted with texts for learning, they do not only need to make sense of them, but also to evaluate, respond to or create new texts. Every learning experience involves thinking, reasoning and conceptualisation, and the language knowledge of the learner becomes the tool for thinking and reasoning. The conceptual and cognitive skills developed in this outcome, together with the development of information skills in a previous outcome, are expected to assist the learners in effective learning in all learning areas and provide the tools for access to the world knowledge and lifelong learning.

When teachers correctly interpret this outcome, they should realize that learning is mediated through language. When learning occurs in the classroom, there is interaction through spoken and non-spoken communication, such as gestures and facial expressions. Classroom interaction therefore becomes important, as the nature of communication and instructional talk will determine the learning that will take place in the classroom. This outcome emphasizes the fact that literacy entails much more than teaching learners to listen, speak, read and write, and that the skills of literacy need to expand to become a tool for learning and achievement in all other learning areas.

This outcome is clearly linked with the text user practice that is suggested in the Four Resources Model. According to Freebody and Luke (1990), a learner in any learning situation will be confronted with some form of text. Every lesson across the curriculum is

geared towards the achievement of a learning area outcome - the teacher selects a specific text with a specific learning outcome in mind. It is imperative that the learner listens and understands the purpose of gathering information, to be able to successfully understand and carry out the instruction. The learner then has to interact with the text according to the instruction. The first step is recognition of the text. Thereafter, the learner is expected to identify the type of text, so that he/she will understand what he/she can gain from the text. Each type of text has particular structures and features, which might be different or similar to previous texts to which the learners have been exposed. Familiar language and sentence structures will assist the learners to cope effectively and to progress towards the outcome. Unfamiliar concepts, however, will pose a challenge to the learners and require instructional support from the teacher for effective learning to take place. To successfully develop this literacy skill, Freebody and Luke (1990) suggest that different types of texts, such as poems, advertisements, reports, brochures and posters, be used in the classroom. The challenges in the learning environment will become more complex as the learners progress through the school system. The expectations for the learners will go beyond the mere decoding of signs and symbols and the recognition of words to a much deeper understanding, to enable them to use a variety of texts effectively for learning.

**“Outcome 7. Learners use appropriate communication strategies for specific purposes and situations**

This specific outcome aims at the development of the learner's ability to apply communication skills and strategies appropriately to a specific purpose and a defined situation.”

[Source: Western Cape Education Department Policy Document (October 1997), p. 53]

The description of this outcome points to the importance of using relevant communication strategies to ensure effective communication for specific purposes and situations in everyday life. In our daily interaction with people, communication takes place in different

forms - verbal, non-verbal (which includes body language and tone), and written communication.

As it is understood that language is the tool for communication, the choice of words or language will influence the quality of communication. Communication, which is known to be the process of transmitting information from one individual to another, is a complex process that has potential causes for errors like misinterpretation or the distortion of information. It is important that everything possible should be done to prevent the loss of meaning in a conversation. Besides the meaning that is derived from the language and words used during verbal conversation, a great deal of meaning is interpreted from the non-verbal body language and voice intonation used by the communicator. Changing of the tone of one's voice, facial expressions and gestures can alter the meaning of words.

When teachers interpret this outcome correctly, their teaching should be focused on the creation of opportunities and situations for young learners to experiment with relevant and appropriate communication strategies. The intention of this outcome is to equip the learner from Grade One onwards, with the necessary skill and knowledge to communicate orally and visually in a range of familiar social situations. In order to guide the learners towards the achievement of this outcome effectively, the teacher will initially have to engage the learners in activities, such as greeting one another, having telephone conversations, the expression of feelings, etc. Later, the activities can be extended to include role-play, dialogue, debates and interaction in groups. As the learners acquire the appropriate verbal skills for communication, they transfer that knowledge to respond in writing for specific purposes. This could include simple news reports, thank you letters and instructions at these early stages of the curriculum.

The development of the text user practice suggested by Freebody and Luke (1990) emphasizes the understanding of purposes of written, spoken and visual texts and using texts in different ways for different functions. This corresponds with the intention of this last outcome of the South African literacy curriculum. However, Freebody and Luke go beyond the development of appropriate communication strategies and call for an understanding of literacy that reflects the literacy demands of learners' present environment and the future society in which they will eventually live and work. In order to operate effectively in home, school and the workplace, the learners must be able to read, speak, view, listen and write

adequately and appropriately. They will be required to recognize the coding system and the language conventions that are needed to understand the message or information conveyed. In South Africa we have a diverse society with a cultural dimension that cannot be ignored. This cultural aspect forces us to pay particular attention to the way in which meaning is attached to language and words in particular contexts and for specific purposes. A third dimension that needs to be considered is the fact that literacy has a transformational aspect, which not only allows the learner to participate in and make meaning of messages, but also facilitates interpretations of texts.

After unpacking each outcome, it is evident that there are corresponding elements in the intentions of the South African literacy outcomes and the suggested integrated literacy framework of Freebody and Luke (1990). Both models agree that literacy is not about simply knowing how to read and write at a basic level. It is understood that literacy has a much broader meaning that includes comprehending what is read, reflecting on and evaluating what is learned, becoming aesthetically engaged in reading and writing processes and knowing how to find and use knowledge in new situations to achieve goals.

## **Chapter 4**

### **1. Analysis and discussion**

This chapter will present the findings from an investigation into the details of the literacy programme, the instructional strategies most commonly used and the effects of that specific approach on the literacy practices in a specific classroom, within the boundaries of the current literacy outcomes context discussed in Chapter three.

According to Comber (2003), research has consistently shown that the quality of teaching influences the literacy achievement of learners. In the analysis of the classroom transcripts, the focus will be on the components of the literacy programme, the types of strategies used during literacy teaching and the nature of the interactions between the teacher and the learners during the daily literacy learning session.

Although the official minimum literacy teaching time for Grade One is one hour and fifty minutes per day, according to the South African Outcomes-based curriculum (Western Cape Education Department Policy Document, October 1997), the literacy teaching time in this classroom was scheduled from 10h30 till 12h00. This amounts to one-and-a-half hours instructional time, five days a week, to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes as stated in the literacy outcomes. At the start of the literacy session in this classroom, the learners were usually all seated at their tables for specific literacy instruction, which included rhymes, songs and listening exercises. During the course of the session, the teacher would work with smaller focused groups in the literacy corner situated at the back of the classroom, while the other learners were busy with activities at their tables. Movement in the classroom was restricted because of the limited space to accommodate the large number of learners.

## **2. Nature and content of the literacy programme**

### **2.1 Contextualised teaching**

In the South African Outcomes-based curriculum policy document (1997), topic-based contextualised teaching is emphasised for the organizing of curriculum content and to integrate knowledge and skills across the curriculum. When Grade One teachers were trained, they were guided to decide on a number of suitable topics that they could use throughout the year to provide the learning contexts for the planning of Literacy, Numeracy and the Life Skills learning programmes. The following excerpts show how topics such as "Seasons" and "Animals" were used to create the context for the inclusion of recitations, songs and discussions in the literacy programme.

#### **Excerpt 1**

1. T: Let's say our autumn verse.
2. L: [Children join in saying the verse]
3. T: Thinking caps on. I'll tell a story. Please listen. Sing our Rainbow
4. song.
5. L: [Children sing together]
6. T: Did you enjoy the song?
7. L: Yes.
8. T: Who taught you the song?

In Line 1, the teacher invited the learners to join in and say a verse about autumn and, in Line 3, to sing the Rainbow song, which they had been taught in previous weeks when they covered the topic on "Seasons". The learners obviously knew the words and enjoyed doing the activity together.

The following is another example of the teacher integrating vocabulary knowledge and learning into the broader theme of animals.



## **Excerpt 2**

1. T: Listen up children. Children on the mat concentrate, cross
2. legs, fold arms.
3. T: I am going to give you little animals.
4. T: What will you do if you see this animal in your garden at
5. home?
6. [She hands out the plastic animals to each pair of learners]
7. T: Talk to your partner about the animal.
8. T: Does everybody have an animal?
9. [She repeats the instruction]

In this excerpt, the discussion is about animals, a well-known topic that forms part of the learners' prior experience. In Line 6, it is noted that plastic replicas of animals were used as resources to enhance the discussion and the comprehension of the learning material during this activity.

When a familiar topic is used to organize the content of the curriculum, the teaching strategy is consistent with a constructivist approach to learning (Vygotsky, 1978). This approach operates on the belief that learners will understand meanings of a concept much better if they create the meaning by using prior knowledge and present experiences and their learning is guided by more knowledgeable adults or peers.

In this classroom, the topics "Seasons" and "Animals" were chosen to provide a context for the teaching of literacy skills and for learning across the different learning areas of the curriculum. The teacher used the topic to assist the learners in making meaning of the information that was shared during the literacy session and to engage in conversation to increase their vocabulary. Both the topics were well chosen, as they were relevant and appropriate for Grade One learners. It must be noted that these topics were also used in subsequent oral and reading texts, to extend the literacy learning experience of the learners. This created the opportunity to move beyond teaching literacy as a technical activity, where the focus is mostly on the recognition of letters and words. By using topics or thematic units to expand vocabulary knowledge and meaning-making during the literacy lesson, she provided a learning experience at a more active and deeper cognitive level.

This made it possible to link the literacy knowledge and skills to other learning area content as is intended in Literacy Outcome Six.

The inclusion of songs and rhymes in the literacy learning context is usually intended to enhance the knowledge and the awareness of sounds. However, the inclusion of the Autumn verse (Excerpt 1) and the Rainbow song (Excerpt 2) at this stage of the lesson did not have much instructional value, as it was apparently only used to introduce the literacy lesson and to get the learners to focus on and pay attention to what the teacher was doing. There is no clear indication of the value that those activities add to the literacy learning, other than the learners being kept occupied for a few minutes. The learners' responses to the instructions were limited to the recitation of the rhyme and the singing of the song, passive participation and a simple "yes" answer to the questions. This activity lasted a few minutes and did not focus on sounds or develop into any further enquiry or extended discussion as is required in the literacy outcomes. Although there were numerous possibilities for relevant further discussion around the verse and the song, the teacher did not guide the learner activity into a more valuable exercise as Rogoff (1990) intended with the constructivist approach to learning.

## **2.2 The development of listening skills**

During one literacy session, the teacher concentrated on developing the literacy skill of listening carefully to instructions and for information. Within the South African curriculum, there are a few literacy outcomes that intend to develop listening skills for very specific purposes. There was strong emphasis on the development of the learners' perceptual skills, especially listening skills, which according to the teacher, were not well developed. She was of the opinion that the learners had difficulty in concentrating on her verbal instructions and that it often adversely affected their literacy learning, especially when they were required to answer questions correctly and to listen carefully with understanding and for new information. The teacher also discovered that the absence of good listening skills impacted negatively on learning across the curriculum where learners were expected to listen with comprehension. All the learners were subjected to daily listening exercises, which included listening to short stories, answering questions about the story, listening to a range of numbers and reciting them in the correct sequence. These types of listening

activities did not challenge the learners to critically respond to the text in any way, which is a requirement of the outcomes.

In Excerpt Three, there is an example of a different type of listening exercise that was given to the learners at the start of the phonics lesson. This was a more difficult instruction that required a sequence of activities from the learners.

### **Excerpt 3**

1. T: Which words sound the same -
2. T: watch, man, pan?
3. L: Man, pan
4. T: Fig, bed, pig
5. L: Fig, pig
6. T: Cut, hen, pen
7. L: Hen , pen
8. T: I do these auditory exercises, for concentration.

In Line 1 to 7, the learners were challenged to listen carefully, to distinguish between the sounds in the words and to select those that sounded the same. Very often the teachers expect this level of listening to just happen in the Grade One classroom. It must be emphasized that in this classroom, there were learners from diverse cultural and home backgrounds who had different language orientations. It is assumed that the learners were exposed to different listening experiences during the first six years before attending formal school. Embedded in the current literacy outcomes, is the intention to assist the learners in the development of the skill of listening, with the focus on auditory discrimination. Phonemic awareness must be developed to such an extent that the learners will be able to distinguish between the different sounds that they hear. This is particularly necessary for a group of learners who are receiving instruction in their second language, as in this case study. The skill of listening must be developed to such an extent that the learners' will reach the comprehension level of being able to discard less important and irrelevant information and to focus on the key understandings of a text. By the nature of the comment of the teacher in Line 8, it can be assumed that the teacher could possibly be ignorant of the fact that her instruction required more than just concentration to do this type of exercise

successfully. While the teacher puts much emphasis on auditory development and believes that it is a necessary element of literacy instruction, Freebody and Luke (1990) do not agree that it is sufficient for the development of higher order literacy skills. A focus on 'listening' as a discrete skill, separate from context, not directed at achieving a desired outcome, is meaningless. Listening activities should directly and intentionally prepare the young learners for new learning challenges, which would require listening with understanding and listening to texts for information as is envisaged by the literacy outcomes.

### **2.3 The inclusion of visual perception exercises**

As part of her literacy programme, the teacher also included visual perception exercises on a daily basis. These exercises usually preceded the time when she did explicit phonics instruction. The exercises included left-to-right directionality, which the teacher understood was a pre-requisite skill for reading. For about ten minutes, the lesson entailed instructions to learners about the directions and colours of different shapes on a chart. The learners were allowed to answer as groups of boys and girls and as individuals. This exercise linked the knowledge of left-to right direction and mathematical knowledge of colours and shapes. The learners had to correctly identify the shape, colour and direction in order to do the activity. This teacher assumes that pointing to the shapes will eventually enable the learner to view a written, printed or visual text critically, as the outcome requires.

The following excerpt demonstrates the nature of a visual exercise, which the learners were subjected to every day.

#### **Excerpt 4**

1. T: Okay babies, let's say our shapes all together.
2. L: Red circle, yellow circle, blue circle.
3. T: Thank you very much for the colours and shapes. We will now
4. say the directions and indicate with our hands.
5. L: Up, down, left, right.....

In Line 1, the teacher gave the instruction, without clearly stating that the purpose of the activity was to focus on the shapes or direction in the exercise. Directionality or the skill of distinguishing between shapes and colours was not emphasized as an important aspect of the literacy learning experience of which they were a part. For about ten minutes, the learners were expected to focus on the wall charts and carefully follow the direction of the pointer that the teacher used. The teacher's comment in Line 3 suggested that the focus of the activity was not whether the learners could distinguish between the colours and shapes as a visual discrimination activity, but more on naming the shapes and the colours correctly. The learners responded to the instruction as a group in Lines 2 and 5, which made it difficult to assess the individual ability of the learners. It was evident from the observations that a number of learners were not paying any attention to what was happening on the board. The value of this decontextualised visual exercise, that took a considerable amount of valuable literacy learning time, is questionable. Grade One learners who have not been exposed to written texts in storybooks, magazines and other literature could possibly benefit from eye co-ordination exercises in the beginning stages of literacy learning. The learners must be exposed to different concepts of print, including conventions of print such as directionality – as in the left to right and top to bottom movement of the eyes.

## **2.4 The development of speaking skills**

Another component of the literacy learning session, which the teacher regularly included in her planned programme, was the development of the learners' speaking abilities. These activities could assist in the achievement of a few literacy outcomes that required the development of vocabulary, and meaning-making and communication skills. During the classroom observations it was evident that there were many opportunities for the learners to demonstrate and develop their vocabulary knowledge. As shown in the next excerpt, the learners were exposed to vocabulary while they listened to stories and rhymes that were told and read to them and during the conversations that they listened had to and participated in.

### **Excerpt 5**

1. T: I have a riddle for you.
2. I am small, I walk slowly,
3. I carry my house on my body.
4. What am I?
5. L: Tortoise.
6. T: What is another name for a tortoise? One lives in the sea too.
7. One lives on land and grass.
8. L: The Ninja turtles.
9. T: Yes, they were on television. They live in drains.

The teacher used a riddle as an oral text. The learners had to find the answer to the riddle put to them in Lines 1 to 4. They managed to solve the riddle very easily as they had been part of previous discussions on animals in the classroom. The learners spontaneously linked their knowledge of popular culture, i.e. the television cartoon of the Ninja Turtles, to the classroom knowledge. It is evident in Line 6 and 9 that a simple tool such as a riddle could elicit a great deal of vocabulary learning.

## **2.5 Explicit teaching of vocabulary**

On other occasions, new vocabulary was taught very explicitly. In those instances, the teacher introduced new words, explained their meaning using pictures and gestures and allowed the learners to link the new word knowledge to their own life experiences.

### **Excerpt 6**

1. T: What is this?
2. L: An igloo.
3. T: What is an igloo?
4. L: An ice house.
5. T: That is correct. [A discussion follows] The house is
6. built of ice bricks. They do everything inside.

7. T: What do we call the people that live in igloos?
8. L: I don't know.
9. T: We call them Eskimos.

Pictures were used as learning support material for this discussion, where questions were again used to elicit discussion as in Lines 1 and 3. In Line 5 and 6, the teacher expanded on the answer of the learners and provided them with a direct explanation of the word "igloo". Through further discussion, the teacher directly taught them a new word "Eskimo" in Line 9. Research recommends that new vocabulary be taught thoroughly and that the number of words that are taught explicitly, be kept to a minimum (Armbruster et al, 2001).

## 2.6 The nature of interactions during discussions

In the following excerpts, the learners were given the opportunity to participate in discussions and demonstrate their use of oral language within a specific context.

### Excerpt 7

1. T: Now I will tell you a story, listen carefully. I'll ask you 5 questions.
2. T: Tom and Mary have a dog called Spot They bought Spot at the pet
3. shop when he was still a small puppy. He has a light brown
4. colour and a black spot in his tail. Tom gave Spot a bone. Spot
5. loves chewing bones. When Mary gives him a bone, he buries it
6. in the ground.
7. T: Where did the children get Spot?
8. L: By the pet shop.
9. T: Can we get that in a sentence? Who wants to help the group?
10. Who can repeat that?
11. T: Group 3. What does Spot look like? You must describe him.
12. L: He has a white spot on his tail.
13. T: Is there anything else that you want to say.
14. T: [To the children on the mat (The assistant teacher was absent)]
15. What does he love eating?

**16. L: Bones.**

**17. T: Can we have it in a sentence? [Learners are reluctant, so teacher**

**18. joins learners in completing the sentence.]**

**19. T: What does he do with his bones?**

**20. L: He buries the bones in the garden.**

This is an example of a monologic pattern of discourse (Nystrand et al, 1997), characterized by knowledge being initiated by the teacher to the learner with the intention of creating meaning along the way. The teacher initiated the discussion by giving the learners the details of the story. In Line 1, the teacher informed the learners about the activity and explained the role that she as the teacher would play and also shared with the learners what would be expected of them in the activity.

Lines 2 to 6 are an account of the story which she only told once and expected the learners to focus on before confronting them with questions about the text. The fact that these learners came from diverse backgrounds and experiences could very well have impacted on the learners' responses, even though the topic was assumed to be a familiar one. The type of question set in Line 7 merely required the learners to recall the text. In Line 11, the learners were requested to provide a sentence describing the dog. One of the learners gave a perfectly correct response. However, when challenged to elaborate on the dog (Line 13), the learners were reluctant to respond, even though the topic was a familiar one.

In Line 13, the question allowed the teacher to check the learners' understanding of the text. Although she invited the learners to give different responses, they were not given sufficient time to answer and the teacher immediately confronted them with another question. Young learners need more time to think carefully about questions and to understand what is being asked of them, so that they can respond successfully. When the teacher asked the following question on the content of the story, the learners could not answer in a full sentence. The teacher then stepped in and assisted the learners in constructing a sentence.

The reluctance of the learners to provide full sentences could either indicate confusion about the instruction or a lack of vocabulary to expand the sentence. In this situation, the whole class was involved in the conversation and while the teacher lead and directed the



type of talk most of the time, fewer opportunities were given to the learners to extend the discussion about the dog. This excerpt demonstrates the position of Cazden (1988), that spoken language is an important medium by which literacy learning takes place and can be demonstrated in classrooms.

## **2.7 Patterns of interaction**

The data included further activities done in the classroom to involve the learners in discussion in order to develop their speaking skills. One was a question-and-answer exercise about sentences based on a colourful wall chart. The topic of 'Animals' was used as context for learning in the classroom at that stage and the picture was in no way related to the subject. The principle of building on the learners' prior knowledge and experience was completely ignored with the choice of text for this activity, especially bearing in mind that understanding needs to be mediated for learners with diverse language orientations.

### **Excerpt 8**

1. T: Okay, I will ask four questions about the story.
2. T: Pam had to put her pram away.
3. Jane had to push her bike into the garage.
4. Ken had to get his bike down and put it in the playroom.
5. It was bedtime for them.
6. T: What did Pam have to put away?
7. L: Pram.
8. T: Where did Jane put her bike?
9. L: In the garage.
10. T: ... What did Ken do?
11. L.: Ken put his bike in the playroom.

In Line 1, the learners were simply informed that questions would be asked about a story. There was no introductory talk to introduce the topic of discussion or explain the purpose of the activity. Although the teacher knew the content of the story, it was completely unknown to the learners and this required careful listening on the part of the learners to follow and

understand the content of the story. Lines 2 to 5 cover the content of the story, which due to differences in their home literacy experiences, were familiar to some learners, but new to others (Dyson, 1993). Although the current literacy outcomes suggest that learners be exposed to a variety of texts, it should be borne in mind that the choice of topics for discussion can inhibit or expand the learning that occurs in the classroom. Learners who have had limited exposure to books and other home literacy practices, can be excluded from the literacy learning experience, because of the differences in the communicative backgrounds and the literacy competencies of the learners.

The familiar content of the picture and sentences were, however, suitable for the interest and developmental level of most of the learners. The answers, although in the form of single words and short phrases (Lines 7 and 9), indicated that the vocabulary used was familiar to a number of learners. They managed to understand the instructions and provide answers without the teacher repeating the story or the instructions. According to Freebody et al (1995), the fact that the classroom practices very often differ from the home literacy practices, necessitates that teachers explain the task and its purpose carefully and guide the learners in completing the activity.

The language pattern in the above excerpt is an example of the IRE pattern of interaction in the classroom, as defined by Gordon Wells (1993). This pattern of discussion usually generates simple one-word responses to the questions initiated by the teacher, which are then evaluated by the teacher. The type of interaction in this classroom is typical of that which has traditionally been experienced in the first years of schooling. Over the years teachers have worked hard to establish this method of question-and-answer during literacy development sessions. By using this strategy, the learners are orientated to the fact that giving answers to texts is linked to them reading and understanding the text. The teacher's reaction and affirmation convince the learners that their reading of the text is adequate and satisfactory. When learners read with this type of interaction, it is usually the teacher who mediates the meaning of the text. The teacher dictates what she wants from the learners after the reading exercise. The data shows that teacher-shaped discussions are currently continuing in this classroom and supports the claim of Freebody and Luke (1990), that this type of interaction guides learners into a specific understanding of what adequate reading entails.

The learner assumes that the procedures regularly followed by the teacher in the classroom are accurate and meaningful literacy practices. In this participation structure, the teacher leads the discussion, has the most turns to talk and allows the learners very little opportunity to construct their own interpretation of the text. With the teacher always being the one who evaluates the text, the learner plays a very subordinate role in the classroom learning environment. Besides the familiar topics used during literacy lessons, there is very little indication that the interests of the young learners were brought into the discussions in the classroom.

The following excerpt demonstrates such a teacher-shaped discussion.

#### **Excerpt 9**

1. T: Look at the picture and tell me what is happening.
2. L: They are throwing the ball to the dog. The dog likes playing with
3. the ball.
4. T: Why is the boy crying?
5. L: He is sad. His dog is gone.
6. T: Look at the next picture. Tell me more about the rooms in this
7. house.
8. L: This is a bedroom and a cupboard.

In Line 1 of the excerpt, the instruction is very specific and demands an accurate account of what is happening in the story. The learners are not allowed the freedom to give their own account of the picture or to use their imagination to create possible scenarios in their interpretation of the picture. The responses of the learners are limited and inhibited, as they do not venture to elaborate on their interpretations.

## **2.8 The teaching of phonics**

Judging by the amount of time allocated to the teaching of phonics every day, heavy emphasis was placed on the inclusion of phonics in the literacy programme. The instruction, however, concentrated only on certain aspects of phonics teaching. Although

phonics teaching was done within the context of the topic of the week, it was not taught in the context of actual reading and writing tasks. It was taught in a very isolated way, concentrating mostly on the recognition and correspondence of sounds and letters. The following is an excerpt of the activity.

#### **Excerpt 10**

**[The teacher tells the learners to listen to the story of the letter K. She instructs the learners to repeat the rhyme after her. ]**

- 1. T: Listen to the story. Alright, I need to see your lips.**
- 2. T: Now listen again, we do the kicking K.**
- 3. Kimbi Kudu**
- 4. Is the king of the Kudus (x3)**
- 5. He can make the K sound.**
- 6. T: Give me all the K words.**
- 7. L: King.**
- 8. T: Write the K on the board. That is very good.**
- 9. L: Kudu**
- 10. L: Kimbi.**
- 11. T: That's great.**

**[This exercise was repeated in the same way with emphasis on the letter Z and took about 10 minutes.]**

In the excerpt, this exercise is actually aimed at developing phonemic awareness, which is the ability to recognise, think about, and to attend to the sounds in spoken words. The learners were meant to listen to the rhyme and to recognize the specific sounds in words. There are a number of literacy outcomes where the learners are expected to interact with spoken, visual and written texts. While engaging with those texts, the opportunity arises to focus on the way in which words are structured and the recognition of sounds in the words. In such a way, the learner is able to learn the skills of phonics and at the same time, hear and see the corresponding letters, which are represented by the sounds. Phonetically, English can be a confusing language. This particular phoneme or speech sound, "K", is an

example of a sound that is not always written with the same letter. This could be difficult for the learners to understand, especially when the sound and corresponding letter are taught out of context, as in this classroom. Learners need phonemic awareness in order to understand that letters represent sounds in spoken words. Learners demonstrate that they have phonemic awareness when they can recognize words that have the same sound, isolate and say the first or last sound, blend sounds to say the word and also segment a word into different sounds. Research has shown that without phonemic awareness, the learners are not likely to benefit from explicit phonics instruction (Braunger and Lewis, 1997). Phonemic awareness and phonics are different concepts. The goal of phonics instruction is to help the learners to learn and use the alphabet principle - that there are relationships between written letters and spoken sounds. Braunger and Lewis (1997) state that awareness of these relationships helps learners to recognise words and to decode new words. Good phonemic awareness and phonics knowledge gradually allow the learner to become familiar with patterns and conventions in written words, which is the intention of Outcome Five.

Although this exercise developed into a demonstration of phonics knowledge, where the learners were expected to indicate the letters corresponding with the sounds on the writing board and also from written words on wall charts, the importance of having letter knowledge in order to work with written texts, was never emphasized by the educator. According to this teacher, the purpose of phonics instruction is to develop the learners' ability to recognize printed letters and to decode words. She agrees with many other researchers, like Chall (1967) and Braunger and Lewis (1997), that learners cannot independently comprehend unfamiliar texts without being able to decode them. This teacher, therefore, acknowledges that learning to decode is a necessary skill in learning to read. Based on this reasoning, she views the reading of texts as an activity that the learners will engage in only after they have acquired sufficient decoding and vocabulary knowledge.

When literacy teaching focuses only on emphasizing the ability to decode texts in order to read, it may have an adverse effect on learners. Learners need additional language skills, such as vocabulary and concept knowledge, as well as decoding abilities, to deal successfully with more difficult texts in the upper grades. According to Chall (1967; 1983), learners who do not acquire the necessary skills to decode and to make meaning of texts,

run the risk of never being able to read for meaning and could cause the decline in the achievement of learners in the Grades between Four and Six. It should be noted that the current literacy outcomes emphasize not only the recognition of sounds, but also exposure to different types of text in order to understand language structures and conventions.

This particular phonics activity concluded with the learners engaging with a written text in the form of an activity. It was expected of the learners to complete words or sentences, by filling in single or combined sounds, and in another activity, the learners were expected to do independent writing of isolated words, as instructed by the educator. Braunger and Lewis (1997) support these types of activities, as they believe that phonics on its own is a necessary, but insufficient condition for learning to read.

## **2.9 The development of reading skills**

This educator believes that her learners should be able to read before they progress to Grade Two and that the learners need to have a good knowledge of sounds in order to recognize the words in texts. She also believes that her learners will benefit from the daily listening skills that she does with them, before the reading exercise every day.

This section explores whether the teacher paid any attention to the development of the learners' reading ability and the nature of the reading activities. This classroom could be described as print-rich, as the walls and writing board were covered with different visual and printed texts. The educator regularly brought these texts to the learners' attention and they were encouraged to use them to support their learning, which was especially evident when they had to complete their phonics worksheets. In one corner of the classroom there was a reading area with Big Books and other literature where the learners could do reading on their own.

Reading is a complex process, often described as the construction of meaning between a reader and a text, and it entails much more than the mere decoding and recognition of words. According to Clay (1991), the main aim of reading is to understand the message of the text. Weaver (1994) points out that learning to read involves empowering the learners with literacy skills and strategies that will enable them to deal successfully with any text. In

this reading session, the educator used a Big Book and replica smaller book copies in an interactive reading experience.

This is an excerpt demonstrating the reading exercise.

#### **Excerpt 11**

1. T: We will do one story quickly. This is a new
2. book on animals. Sit down, I will show you.
3. T: Share the book with a friend. Open the
4. book. What animal is that?
5. L: A cat.
6. T: Say the sounds that make cat.
7. L: C...a...t
8. T: What is the grey animal?
9. L: Rat.
10. T: Say the sounds.
11. L: R...a...t
12. T: There is a sentence at the bottom. Come
13. we try and read the sentence.
14. T & L: A rat in a hat.
15. T: Let's give a few learners a chance to read
16. the sentence.
17. [ About 5 learners read the sentence ]
18. T: Okay our last song. Sit down sweetie. Cross
19. your legs.

The teacher started this reading exercise by informing the learners that they were going to do a story from a Big Book, in Lines 1 and 2. This was intended to be a guided reading exercise where the teacher introduced the text and provided support to the learners with the aim of talking, reading and thinking their way purposefully through the text. Discussion of the text before, during and after the text, is essential to assist the learners' understanding of the text. In this case, however, there was no discussion on the cover of

the Big Book or the learners' books, to allow the learners the opportunity to share any prior knowledge or to activate the learners' interest in the topic.

In Lines 4 and 8, the teacher again used questions to initiate discussion around the picture texts. She involved the learners by allowing them to answer and to sound out the one-word answers in Lines 7 and 11. Only then did she guide the learners in the reading of the written text and invite them to follow in their own books and read along. The content of the book was about animals, a familiar topic for the learners, with predictable texts and illustrations that the learners could sound out and look at, to support their understanding of the text. Reading, under those conditions, amounted to interpretation of the visual text, responding to questions about the text, sounding out words and very little time was spent on the individual reading aloud of the written text.

On another occasion, the educator had prepared written sentences on the board, which she used as the reading text for the day. The sentences were compiled with known vocabulary from the previous topics that were used for oral discussion. The whole class as a group and also individual learners, were given the opportunity to read the following text.

#### **Excerpt 12**

**[These sentences were on the board.]**

**I went down the bridge.**

**I went over the tunnel.**

**I went along the hill.**

**I went over the street.**

**I went up the steps.**

**I went through the gate.**

**I went into the zoo.**

**And then I saw a monkey just like you.**

- 1. T: First I want all of you to read the sentences.**
- 2. [Teacher points to the sentences as children read]**
- 3. T: Now I want the groups to read.**
- 4. T: I am now going to rearrange a few words in the**



5. sentences.
6. T: I want you to read the new sentences.
7. [The learners laughed at the sentences that did not
8. make sense]
9. T: Who wants to read the sentences alone?
10. [The teacher encouraged the children to sound out the
11. words that were difficult. New words were clapped, said
12. slowly and repeated by the learners.]

This was intended to be a reading-aloud exercise of a language experience text that was formulated, using vocabulary taught during topic discussions. The learners were instructed to read aloud, first as a group and then individually. This text reflected a previous experience of the learners and was therefore easily understood by the learners. In Line 1, the teacher gave a very clear instruction as to what she expected from them, which the learners understood. At first, all of the learners were merely expected to read the texts fluently and loudly. At no stage were the learners questioned to determine whether all of them had understood the content of the text. After the words were changed in the sentence, the teacher instructed the groups and then the individuals, to read the new sentences (Line 6). This reading lesson was concluded with a 'cloze' exercise, a common activity in which the learners were expected to complete sentences where specific words had been omitted. The nature of this activity points to mere recognition of the text as the outcome and revealed where the educator's instruction was focused. This type of activity corresponds with 'recognition literacy', the mere process of learning to recognize visual codes that are used to construct and communicate meaning (Hasan, 1996). The literacy outcomes of the current curriculum very clearly state that the learners must not only be able to recognise the text for reading purposes, but also be able to respond to texts in different ways, to show the depth of their understanding.

## **2.10 Types of texts for reading purposes**

Although the current curriculum indicates that a variety of texts should be used for the development of reading, this teacher used only limited types of texts during literacy instruction. There was a clear focus on effective decoding and the identification of the main

idea within these texts. The teacher chose both texts that were used for reading instruction and she moved from using a basal reading programme to using more authentic children's texts in her instruction. Regardless of the new knowledge and understanding of literacy learning that allowed the teacher to move away from using only the basal readers, she had not adapted her instructional methodology to suit that of working with literature-based texts. The current emphasis of the educator's literacy instruction continues to be on decoding texts accurately and reading it aloud fluently. The literacy activities have not been expanded to include the other literacy competencies embedded in the literacy outcomes.

There was very little time set aside for reading during the weekly observation sessions in the classroom. On some days, the learners did little or no book reading. The above excerpts also indicate very little time spent on actual reading of a variety of suitable texts. A number of the current literacy outcomes require that the learners regularly engage with a variety of texts and for different purposes. Regular engagement with different types of texts will assist the development of understanding and word recognition needed for independent reading. Braunger and Lewis (1997) have shown that the amount of time spent reading is strongly related to the quality of comprehension and vocabulary extension and therefore the optimal use of reading time during the daily literacy time-slot is important. Learners need to acquire sufficient and appropriate skills, knowledge and attitudes in order to become successful and fully functional in society.

## **2.11 The development of writing skills**

According to Dyson (1982), the process of acquiring the skill of writing and understanding written language, is complex. As with speaking and listening, reading and writing should not be separated. In the classroom observations, it was interesting to note how much attention was given to the individual letters of the word when the learners wrote their words on the board. This focus on letters and sounds should assist phonemic awareness and word recognition, eventually leading to improved reading. Regular engagement in meaningful reading and writing activities should lead to a more effective understanding of the relationship between the spoken and the written word.

Dyson (1982) believes that learners become writers at the scribbling, drawing and copying stage, long before they have any formal writing instruction. While traditional writing lessons have previously always focused on neatness, correct spelling and letter formation, the current emphasis is on the importance of making meaning and concentrating on the content of writing (Dyson, 1982). Observations in this classroom have indicated that the writing opportunities for learners were limited and consisted mostly of written workbook activities that required the learners to fill in letters on phonics worksheets, to complete words in sentences and the independent writing of words on the writing-board.

### **3. Predominant teaching strategies observed in the classroom**

Classroom life is complex and South African teachers are faced with implementing a new curriculum, as well as coping with growing learner diversity. To ensure learners' literacy development, it is important that they are actively involved in the learning process and that they are given as many opportunities as possible to practice what they have learnt. Vygotsky (1978) states that learners construct new knowledge out of the experiences that they encounter and it is suggested that teachers connect the new knowledge to the prior experiences of the learners during discussions and other activities in the classroom. What is taught during literacy sessions is not the only important factor in the process, equally important is how it is taught. The following section will investigate the most common strategies that this teacher used to facilitate the learners' literacy learning in the classroom.

#### **3.1 IRE Interaction strategies**

As observed in this classroom, the predominant teaching strategy was recitation, with the teacher introducing a text to the learners, mostly in the form of a story, a riddle or a visual text, followed by a series of questions, to which the learners were required to provide predictable and correct answers. Mehan (1979), who examined classroom lessons from Cazden's classroom research, found that the teacher talked most of the time, while the learners played a very passive role, providing mostly 'yes' and 'no' answers and seldom elaborating on them. The intended purpose of this type of interaction strategy is recognition

and recall of texts. With this type of strategy, knowledge is not being transferred to new situations or retained after the lesson, and the knowledge is very seldom linked to prior experiences or used to enhance the ability to think critically and to collaborate with others in problem-solving.

In the following excerpts, the typical IRE (Initiation, Response and Evaluation) sequence can be identified. This type of structure begins with a question, followed by a response and is concluded by an evaluative comment in the form of a 'yes', 'no', 'right' or 'well done' from the adult participant.

### **Excerpt 13**

1. T: Who are the family members?
2. L: Baby, mommy.
3. T: Denzil, who do you see?
4. L: Daddy, sister.
5. T: Good.
6. T: Look at the next picture. Tell me what is happening in the picture.
7. I want to hear you.
8. L: A child is crying. A girl is fighting.
9. T: Where is the girl fighting?
10. T: What happens in picture 3?

In Line 1, the teacher is directing the questions and using a picture of a family as a resource. The learners were expected to examine the visual text to provide the answers. The learners' answers in Lines 2 and 3 were brief and at a simple level. In Line 3, the teacher attempted an open question, but the learners' response remained restricted to giving the content of the visual text. In Line 4, the learner gave a satisfactory response that was followed by the teacher's remark of approval in Line 5. The learners did not ask any questions, question the teacher's interpretations or offer alternative interpretations, as is required by the current literacy outcomes. In Line 6, there was an attempt by the teacher to elaborate on the learners' responses, but she did not allow the time, or the opportunity, for the learners to respond. Instead, the teacher decided to direct the learners' attention to the next picture. According to Cazden (1988), this is a demonstration of how the use of this

pattern more often facilitated teacher control of the interaction, rather than facilitating learning, according to the intended outcome of the lesson.

Wells (1993,1996) argues that if the evaluation part of the IRE sequence is limited to an evaluative comment like "That is good" or "Very good", discussion may be limited and learner participation stifled. However, should the learner's response be followed by the teacher's indication for further discussion, it would stimulate learner involvement in the interaction.

The teacher who uses the IRE sequence for interaction, believes in providing a limited scope of information and this ultimately leads to a very simple and basic field of knowledge, restricted to the development of lower cognitive level processes, such as reciting answers from the given text. This pattern of instruction does not encourage or provide opportunities for students to volunteer new ideas, to connect relevant experiences, to express critical viewpoints or to take risks that could lead to a more comprehensive understanding of concepts. Nystrand et al (1997) claim that different types of interaction patterns place different cognitive demands on learners. The current literacy outcomes also suggest that teachers vary the interaction patterns in their literacy learning programmes.

The findings of this study correspond with the conclusions of Nystrand's study, that this type of interaction is ineffective in promoting significant learning. In addition, this type of interaction does not provide the instructional support needed by learners from a different language background. In this classroom, the teacher continues to dominate the instructional talk. She selects the topics and decides on the questions that will be set to the learners and which of them will have turns to provide the answers. It is evident from these observations that the control and authority of the interactions continue to lie in the hands of the teacher. If the learners are regularly subjected to this type of teacher-controlled activity, they could be led to believe that the teacher is the only person who may initiate any activity in the classroom and that they, as learners, have no right to try out their own ideas, to be creative or to challenge the decisions and the authority of the teacher.

Wells (1993) argues that teachers' pedagogical beliefs are linked to the choices they make about the kinds of interactional patterns they use in their classrooms. Teachers who view learners as active agents in the learning process, are more likely to engage learners in

intellectually challenging interactions. The authoritative, all knowledgeable teacher who sees the learners as passive recipients of knowledge, uses the transmission, IRE pattern of interaction. Where teacher-produced questions and comments are limited to evaluating learner displays of knowledge, and learner contributions are limited to short responses, the classroom discourse is not likely to lead to active student involvement and extended communicative development. Learner participation would rather be limited to simple kinds of activity, like recall, recitation, listing and labelling.

Nystrand et al (1997) have found that when learning happens through the IRE method, learners are less able to recall and understand the topical content compared to learners who are involved in topically-related, open discussions in the classroom. Where teachers' questions and comments are probing and open-ended and the learners are allowed to direct questions at the teacher, participation in the classroom discourse will facilitate learning. According to Nystrand et al (1997), what ultimately matters, is the independent thinking and reasoning that is required from the learner during the literacy experience and not only the ability to report someone else's thinking.

### **3.2 Teacher-directed strategies**

Besides the continued use of the IRE interactional strategy in the classroom, already a clear illustration of teacher-centred instruction, the data indicated further demonstrations of teacher-directed teaching strategies. Teacher-centred instruction means that the teacher controls what is taught, how it will be taught and under which conditions the teaching will take place. This teacher was exclusively responsible for making all the decisions around the planning of the literacy experiences. These decisions included the time that would be allocated to the teaching of literacy every day, the choice of resources and how the learners would spend their literacy time in the classroom every day. She also decided what kinds of literacy experiences were important at a specific time and which resources were the most suitable, be it basal readers, literature or popular culture. The learners had very little choice in any decision-making about the learning that would occur. This is a clear demonstration of the power relationship that certain teachers manage to uphold in the classroom from day to day. For this particular teacher, it is imperative that the basics of listening, speaking, reading and writing are taught and that time is spent around these

activities. However, the data shows that time was not used optimally for those purposes. It is evident from the observations that very little opportunity is allowed for learner innovations and other challenges during the literacy session. The following excerpt will illustrate how the teacher maintained the authoritative structure in the classroom and dominated the conversations.

#### **Excerpt 14**

1. T: Children at this table, come to me quickly. Shana, you must be with
2. me.
3. Please sit down my babies. Are you ready? Thinking caps on.
4. Children at the tables, is there a problem?
5. T: Listen to me. The traffic lights go.....
6. [The teacher repeats and the children follow]
7. T: We continue. Look at my picture. What is this word? What picture do
8. you see?

This exercise demonstrates that the teacher is clearly in control of this interaction. The focus in this classroom is on the teacher as the instructor. In Lines 1,2,5 and 7, the use of the words 'me' and 'my' in her instructions, emphasizes the teacher as the focal point of this activity. In this excerpt, the teacher does most of the talking and, in Lines 1 to 4, the talk is directed towards the management of the learners to maintain order. The teacher directs the acceptable behaviour required, leads the learners in reciting the rhyme, decides on the questions that will be asked and expects the learners to follow her.

This type of approach could lead the learner to believe that the teacher knows best. The focus during the literacy programme should be on the learners being actively involved in learning experiences to achieve the planned literacy outcomes, not on the teacher. Although the learners were engaged in the activity to a certain extent, the emphasis during the learning experience was not on the learner as an active participant, constructing knowledge during the learning process. Lemke (1993) states that both the learner and the teacher construct literacy learning as the dialogue develops between the participants. This notion is supported by Vygotsky (1978), who believes that when learners begin a literacy activity, they depend on the teacher who has more experience, to guide and scaffold their

learning. After a while the learners will have developed useful strategies and sufficient skills to take the responsibility of constructing their own knowledge and meaning.

### **3.3 Interruptions to the flow of academic learning**

The data reveals a phenomenon where on numerous occasions, the teacher interrupted the academic learning to check whether the learners were concentrating and focusing on the activity at hand and behaving appropriately. The teacher introduced certain mechanisms to do this at regular intervals during literacy instructional time. This practice is illustrated in the next excerpt.

#### **Excerpt 15**

1. T: Thinking caps on. I'll tell a story. Please listen. Sing our Rainbow
2. song.
3. L: [Children sing together]
4. T: Did you enjoy the song?
5. L: Yes.
6. T: Who taught you the song? I want to teach you something else. Our
7. star number for the day is 6879.
8. If you can tell me the star number, then you get an edu-sticker.
9. [She asks one of the children]
10. L: [Child repeats the number correctly]
11. T: Brilliant, excellent.
12. T: Now I will tell you a story, listen carefully.

In Line 1, the teacher very explicitly informed the learners of the activities that they needed to engage in, which included listening to a story and singing a song. Immediately after the learners had completed the song, she confronted them with a star number, which they were expected to remember and to repeat correctly. The 'star number' consisted of four to five digits, selected by the teacher to be memorized for the day. If done correctly, this exercise would earn them an edu-sticker (Line 7). Edu-stickers are customised motivational stickers used by the teacher as rewards for good work. The reactions of the learners



indicated that they were accustomed to this practice, which, according to the data, was done on a regular basis. The learners were further encouraged by the affirmative and encouraging remarks of the teacher in Line 11. Directly after this, in Line 12, she continued with the story.

The danger of the academic literacy learning being interrupted with management and behavioural routines is that, at the end of the day, the purpose of the supposedly literacy-focused lesson is not clear to the learner. The message that the learners in this classroom may have got is that literacy learning is more about developing behavioural skills, than developing specific literacy competencies.

The teacher had also taught the learners a number of rhymes and songs that she initiated at any time during the lessons, with the expectation of the learners joining her. According to the observations, this happened quite regularly and the learners were forced to abandon all literacy-linked activities that they were attending to at that point, and join in reciting the numbers with the teacher. This teacher placed much emphasis on praising and acknowledging obedient and good behaviour during such an activity and rewarded the learners with stars and accolades (Line 11).

It was noted that not all the learners reacted to this interruption immediately and not all of them joined in with the singing. The inclusion of these types of activities and the intended purpose of the activity is questionable, as they are not geared towards any of the current literacy outcomes. A further concern is whether the instructional talk that the learners are exposed to in the classroom will assist the development of the knowledge, attitudes and skills that are necessary for sustainable literacy development. The following excerpt will examine the talk, which was observed during vocabulary instruction.

#### **Excerpt 16**

- 1. L: These animals have lots of names. Monkey, baboon, guerrilla.**
- 2. T: What other word?.....Ape**
- 3. T: What is this?**
- 4. L: [Struggle with the word].... Bug.**
- 5. L (Denzil) : Teacher, can we go to the loo?**

6. T: Look at the time. Didn't you go to the bathroom in break? It is
7. dangerous to go to the loo.
8. T: It is on the outskirts of the school building.
9. T: Look at the pictures and tell me what they are doing.

Line 5 is a typical example of the literacy lesson being interrupted by a learner who has a physical need. The teacher stops the academic flow of the lesson and disrupts the attention and concentration of the rest of the learners to answer to the need of the learner. In a Grade One class consisting of forty-six learners during a lengthy literacy session of one-and-a half-hours, this is the reality facing the educator. She is still expected to manage the class in such a manner that learning can take place. Because of the unsafe school environment, the educator is compelled to emphasize the danger of going to the toilets alone during teaching time. In the meantime, the other learners are forced to shift their attention to the dialogue between the teacher and the learner. Everyday management of learners is necessary and it is not practical or realistic to ignore the learners' needs. Immediately after that interruption, the teacher continues the lesson where she left off and the learners immediately resume the procedure of answering questions (Line 9). This teacher believes that having a manageable class is part of having success with the development of literacy skills. Good teaching and effective learning are synonymous with tight teacher control, with the understanding that it is incumbent on the teacher to ensure that the learner is engaged in actions that will sustain the learning process to the end of the lesson (Lemke, 1993).

### **3.4 Regulative discourse**

Short et al (2000), drawing on the work of Bernstein (1971; 1977; 1990; 1996), has illustrated that the principles of power and control that teachers use in their classroom practices, can limit access to the knowledge and skills that learners develop by perceiving and interacting with the world around them. For many learners the most common experience of schooling is one of formality and hierarchy, where teachers determine which roles the participants in the learning process will play, which rules will govern learning in the classroom and what procedures will be used for the evaluation of the learners' activities. Bernstein (1996) argues that what teachers teach, how they teach it, and the way

in which the learners' learning is evaluated, convey powerful messages with regard to what the teacher, through a curriculum, considers both important and valid knowledge.

Teacher pre-occupation with the contextual realities, such as content coverage and control of student behaviour, often appear to distract teachers from attending effectively to the management of learning processes and episodes, the pedagogic discourse and to the achievement of planned learning outcomes. Bernstein (1990) refers to the transmission of skills and their relation to one another as instructional discourse and the principles of social order, relation and identity as regulative discourse. Regulative discourse communicates the school's public moral values, beliefs and attitudes, principles of conduct, character and manner. It also transmits features of the school's local history, local tradition and community relations.

In this classroom, the educator is faced with the reality of ensuring quality learning to a large number of learners with very diverse literacy needs. To cope with the realities of the situation and still maintain an environment conducive to learning, the teacher created certain classroom rules and behaviour regulatory routines. Freebody et al (1995) have found that a large percentage of literacy learning time is spent on managerial issues, issues of control and organization in the normal classroom. They have also found that this phenomenon results in a loss of valuable teaching time and an interruption of the academic learning that is supposed to take place during that time.

The following excerpts illustrate the regulative behaviour routines observed in the classroom.

#### **Excerpt 17**

1. T: Children at this table come to me quickly. Shana, you must be
2. with me. Please sit down my babies. Are you ready?
3. T: Thinking caps on. Children at the tables, is there a problem?
4. T: Listen to me. The traffic lights go.....
5. [Children are expected to join in the saying of the verse]

In Lines 1 to 5, the focus is on the learners' behaviour and a request for attention and order, with very little activity linked to the achievement of the literacy outcomes. The following excerpt demonstrates a further focus on behaviour.

#### **Excerpt 18**

1. T: We will do the star number and then I will introduce a new
2. book to you.
3. T: Children at the table, I can still hear whispers.
4. Can your eyes sparkle? I want to see Shana's eyes.
5. If we make a noise, do we disturb others?
6. L: Yes, we do.

It is evident from the excerpt that the educator places great emphasis on the fact that the learners need to concentrate and that the introduction of the new book is subject to the demonstration of good behaviour and attentiveness. The following excerpt demonstrates the continued focus on behaviour management during groupwork instruction.

#### **Excerpt 19**

1. T. Look at the pictures and tell me what they are doing.
2. L. They are playing on the see-saw.
3. T. Children at the tables, if I can't hear Tashrika on the mat, then
4. you are making a noise. What is happening in this picture?
5. What happens if they go up and down on the see-saw?

In Lines 1 and 2, the teacher is instructing a group of learners on the mat to focus on the pictures and to answer the follow-up question as part of a discussion. Suddenly, in Lines 3 to 5, the attention of the teacher is shifted towards disciplining the learners who are working at their tables. For the instructional group on the mat, the focus of the lesson shifted from literacy to a lesson on correct behaviour. This teacher expected the learners to behave in a certain way, while doing literacy-related activities independently at their tables. The intention of the teacher to regulate behaviour, may have an adverse effect on the learners as they could possibly understand literacy learning as only being the participation in an

organizational and behavioural routine when working at the tables. It is incumbent on the teacher to inform the learners that a literacy lesson constitutes learner involvement in actions that are directly geared towards the achievement of the literacy outcomes.

The data shows that it is important for this teacher to have a manageable class. She believes that a particular form of behaviour is necessary for successful literacy learning in school. This teacher knows her learners' social and cultural backgrounds and the problems that they are faced with in their every day lives. Based on the knowledge and home circumstances of her learners, she makes the decisions about the most suitable and manageable learning environment. These day-to-day realities could be guiding the teacher to construct classroom literacy practices that would accommodate the diversity and differences found in today's classrooms. Observations in this classroom show that this teacher accepts her task as not only developing literacy skills, but also to develop fundamental values in disciplined and productive learners.

The data from the above-mentioned excerpts have indicated that literacy learning towards the achievement of the current outcomes have not always remained the focal point and the primary concern in this Grade One classroom. The transcripts show how participation in the lesson required student compliance with specific interactive routines in the classroom, as discussed by Edward-Groves (2001). Certain interactive routines were practised during literacy learning in this classroom, such as having the learners put up their hands to answer and turn-taking during discussions. The literacy objectives were not made very clear to the learners and interjecting instructions with regard to behaviour could lead to the learners being confused as to what is really expected of them. A great deal of the teaching was directed to classroom participation skills and behaviour, rather than explicit development of specific literacy knowledge and skills. On the other hand, this could be an indication of the teacher's understanding of good literacy teaching. The teacher could be measuring literacy success by looking at appropriate behaviour, instead of looking at the literacy knowledge and skill demonstrated by the learner.

Freebody et al (1995) have found in their classroom research, that very little time is spent on the teaching and learning of literacy competencies; most of the time is spent on managing, controlling and organising the learners. This is seen as a problem by Freebody et al (1995), as valuable teaching and learning, essential for the development of related

literacy skills, is neglected. They believe that effective classroom and behaviour management is necessary, but that it should not encroach on the time allocated to optimal literacy learning. Constant attention to behaviour should not dominate the classroom and misdirect the literacy learning focus. Regular interruption of the literacy lesson to attend to managerial matters, disrupts the learning process, which could impact on the learners' concentration and flow of thinking and could hinder lesson continuity, especially in a Grade One classroom where the learners' attention span is very limited.

#### **4. Conclusion**

It can be concluded from the data that the teacher in this Grade One classroom is operating within a certain pedagogical framework, which she believes is acceptable literacy practice and complies with the current literacy outcomes. While the teacher assumes that what she is doing is right, the children could be experiencing difficulty with the mixed and conflicting messages they receive from the teacher during the lesson, as there is very little distinction between the teacher's address of management issues or academic matters within the classroom.

The teacher's focus on the decoding of texts, reading aloud fluently and the comprehension of the text, points to a modernist perspective of reading. Street (1984) has referred to a modernist perspective of reading as a model where reading is associated with a set of skills that readers apply to a text in order to understand the meaning that resides within the text. A modernist perspective is based on the belief that meaning is located in the text and can be uncovered by analysing the text. With this approach to reading, the educator tends to teach the related reading skills, such as phonics and word recognition, in a direct and sequential manner in the classroom.

Although the educator claims that, because of the inclusion of all the above-mentioned skills, she is using a balanced approach, she is limited by a very narrow definition of reading, which is not the intention of the current literacy outcomes. Research has shown that literacy skills taught in isolation (e.g. teaching of the alphabet or word drill), may improve learners' writing skills, but will not develop sufficient reading skills, build vocabulary

and concept formation or language skills, to sustain learning (Braunger and Lewis, 1997). When the ability to recognise letters and to sound out words is the focus of instruction, as in this classroom, the learners could experience a deceleration of skills in Grade Four, especially those learners who have not had exposure to stories and other reading and writing experiences (Chall and Jacobs, 1983; Chall, 1969, 1983). Another concern, which becomes evident from the data, is that the educator is not differentiating her approach to literacy development in order to accommodate the learners from different language backgrounds.

Luke (1995) argues that although the ability to decode and recognize words are necessary skills for readers, there are other practices, knowledge and skills that readers need to develop alongside those, in order to have a broader understanding of literacy in our present society. All learners, but especially those with diverse language backgrounds, need enough time and access to a variety of texts, and need to develop a range of strategies to decode words and to make sense of the texts. Learners who have a range of strategies to use when they are stuck on a word, will be able to take an active part in solving the problems that they encounter in the reading process.

If we consider the scope of literacy practices that are suggested in the Four Resources Model of Freebody and Luke (1990) and the current literacy outcomes that are described in Chapter Two of this study, the approach that the teacher is demonstrating in this classroom is clearly restricting the literacy development of the learners. Barbara Comber (2002) states very emphatically that, at the end of the day, it is not the quality of the learners' reading performance that should be important, but what the learners are capable of doing with the texts that they are confronted with on a daily basis.

The teacher's pre-occupation with classroom control rather than with management of learning experiences to achieve the planned learning outcomes, can change the objectives of the lesson. The observations indicate that the teacher laboured the point of good behaviour, instead of that of focused learning. The teacher did not appear to know how to simultaneously control learner-behaviour, whilst effectively managing the learning process. It is imperative that the teacher knows exactly what she wants the learners to learn and how the learning outcomes could be effectively realised and assessed.

The question is: "How does a teacher plan, enact and reflect upon classroom teaching in order to achieve learning outcomes for her learners?". According to Lemke (1993), a lesson is socially constructed through dialogue between the teacher and the learners in the classroom. The teacher and learners who participate in the activity, create or construct it by choosing particular actions to start, to continue and to end the activity. As the lesson is constructed, learners are expected to learn to think, to talk and to write according to a particular format. For learners to participate constructively rather than destructively in a lesson, they must be proficient users of language.

The data indicates that focus needs to be redirected to the delivery of the specific type of literacy learning that is envisaged by the current literacy outcomes, which were discussed in Chapter Three. The ineffective, restricting approaches, which this teacher is currently using in the classroom have to be addressed. It is important for the teacher to have clarity on the learning that is intended by the literacy outcomes, to enable her to plan accordingly and so that she understands what to focus on in order to improve her classroom literacy practices. The important question that the teacher should ask is: "What am I preparing my learners for with the current classroom literacy practices that they are exposed to and is it in line with what is envisaged by the outcomes?".



## **Chapter 5**

### **1. Conclusion**

In the first chapter of this study, the foundation was laid for the need to undertake an investigation into the classroom literacy practices of a specific teacher, working within a specific learning environment with learners of diverse language, social and cultural orientations. Chapter One contextualized the problem of low literacy achievement in the first few years of school and discussed possible factors that were impacting on the achievement of the literacy outcomes in this country.

The second chapter described a selection of theories that are relevant to this study. The selected theories are all associated with the socio-cultural perspective of literacy learning. The current South African literacy outcomes acknowledge that the social context and the cultural orientations of the participants in the learning process shape the literacy learning that occurs in classrooms. These theories were used to support and substantiate the analysis of the data and the discussion of the findings of this study. Chapter Two continued by describing the research methodology used to carry out this investigation and explaining the procedures of data collection, data capturing and the process that had been followed to analyse the data collected during the classroom observations.

The current South African literacy outcomes context was discussed in Chapter Three, as the teacher's current literacy program would be planned and implemented within that specific context. Literacy outcomes were described individually to identify the desired activities that were embedded in each outcome. Each outcome detailed specific knowledge, skills and attitudes that the learners were expected to develop from their first year of formal schooling. The activities that were identified in these outcomes were then discussed in relation to the literacy practices suggested in the socio-cultural literacy model of Freebody and Luke (1990), which was presented as part of the theoretical considerations in Chapter Two.

Transcripts of the observations were selected for careful analysis in Chapter Four. Each excerpt from the transcripts was chosen to highlight a particular literacy activity in the classroom. The excerpts were analysed to identify the nature of the activity, the strategies that were applied during the literacy learning session and the responses of the learners during the classroom literacy activities. These analyses highlighted certain trends of literacy learning and significant understandings of classroom literacy practices.

The theoretical considerations in Chapter Two, the discussion of the literacy outcomes in relation to the socio-cultural model of Freebody and Luke (1990), in Chapter Three and the discussion of the data in Chapter Four have guided this study to important conclusive understandings with regard to the current literacy instruction in this Grade One class.

The South African Outcomes-based curriculum mandates the literacy practices that have to take place in the classroom. The current literacy outcomes provide the framework for the teaching of literacy and dictate that, what Grade One learners learn, needs to be meaningful, relevant and child-centred. It provides teachers with a framework for the planning of classroom literacy programs; indicating the main focus of each outcome, the scope of the learning, how to build on prior knowledge and suggesting a variety of strategies that would be suitable for the diverse needs of the learners.

It does not prescribe that teachers teach literacy skills in isolation. While the teachers are aware that they need to plan according to the outcomes, this particular teacher apparently does not allow the outcomes to completely dictate what she teaches and how she instructs literacy in her classroom. The data has indicated that in the fifth year of implementation of the current outcomes, the literacy activities in this particular classroom still only *partially* reflect the mandated practices stated in the literacy outcomes. The data shows that this teacher continues to use the traditional skills-based direct instruction approach, as found in research by Chall (1996). This approach focuses on phonics teaching, but also incorporates the whole-language approach to literacy learning.

For the teaching of vocabulary, word attack and word recognition, the teacher made use of whole texts and big books to teach literacy. She was not very clear about the purpose for using those texts and the texts were not used to teach a broad range of literacy skills during the lesson. The data has shown that the learners were not given enough opportunity

for in-depth discussion to come to a variety of interpretations of the text, nor was reference made, at any stage, to the relevance of the text to the learners' lives. The limited choice of text used did not allow much opportunity to point out to the learners the many ways in which texts could be used in the classroom and everyday activities and how readers could benefit from exposure to different types of texts. The data has shown that the letter sounds were not always taught within the context of using a text and very often included unrelated written phonics activities. Such decontextualised phonics teaching and writing activities did not allow the learners to integrate their knowledge or to transfer their knowledge across the other learning areas in order to enhance the learning process.

The teacher mostly used the question-and-answer method to guide discussions and to determine whether the learners had understood the content of the text. The use of such limited strategies for literacy learning could put the learners of different language orientations and literacy ability at a disadvantage. Learners who do not have the necessary vocabulary knowledge and language skills might not be able to benefit from the few strategies that are used during literacy learning

The analysis and discussion in Chapter Four has also highlighted the fact that the teacher was teaching literacy in a restrictive manner. There was an over-emphasis on the management of the learners and few opportunities for focused literacy learning towards the achievement of the literacy outcomes. The question remains whether the teacher currently knows the requirements of the literacy outcomes and whether she can describe what she does during the literacy learning session, in terms of those requirements. Successful achievement of the outcomes, however, will depend on how the educator combines those methods to suit the literacy needs of the different learners in the classroom.

## **1.1 My position on literacy**

The theoretical considerations in Chapter Two and the literacy outcomes prescribed in the South African Outcomes-based curriculum (Western Cape Education Department Policy Document, October 1997), have redirected my understanding of literacy in this study to acknowledge the following important views, which should transform the teacher's thinking around literacy learning.

### **1.1.1 Acknowledge that literacy is a socially constructed activity**

Contemporary views on learning give much more recognition to the importance of interaction and the role of the learner in the construction of knowledge. From birth, the young infant interacts with other human beings, which results in learning of some sort. The child's language development is enhanced by the continued exposure to language used by his/her parents, siblings and other adults in his/her environment. Through the process of social interaction, knowledge is constructed and literacy learning is developed between the participants in the home and the environment. When the learners start formal schooling in Grade One, their home and cultural experiences have allowed them to develop personal and cultural literacy knowledge on which teachers can build. This existing literacy knowledge must be activated during classroom literacy activities, to continue the construction of new knowledge through the active use of language during interactions in the classroom. During this collaborative learning process, the learners work alongside a more knowledgeable and experienced person, to be guided and supported until they can manage the new knowledge successfully. As the learners develop confidence through repetition and consolidation of new knowledge, the support of the teacher can be withdrawn until the learner can work independently.

### **1.1.2 A variety of texts should be used for literacy learning**

The current literacy outcomes place much emphasis on the use of a variety of texts in literacy instruction. Traditionally teachers have used published texts such as basal readers, textbooks and children's storybooks for the purpose of literacy teaching. Current literacy practices have expanded to include the use of literature-based texts and texts created by the learners, which are known as language-experience texts. The literacy outcomes suggest the use of visual, oral, written or printed texts. Visual texts may include pictures, videos, comic strips, etc. Oral texts include conversations, audio recordings and stories, while written and printed texts could include basal readers, textbooks, magazines and newspapers. These texts need not be in the form of permanent or very formal printed products. As long as it serves the intended purpose for literacy learning, it could even be informal and handwritten by the teacher or learners. Texts can be used in different ways during literacy instruction, depending on the approach and its suitability for a specific

purpose. Basal texts usually prescribe to teachers the type of skills, topics and knowledge content that will be covered during literacy learning, which could be very different from the world and experiences of the learners or the intention of the outcomes. Very often the texts are too difficult, uninteresting or contain biased ideologies, negative attitudes and views that are not appropriate for diverse learners. If the teacher uses a wide range of text types, the learners will be exposed to the different ways in which texts can be constructed and used.

The correct choice of texts could provide opportunities for reading, as well as expanded opportunities for reflecting on the text, critical evaluation thereof and accessing information from texts. Texts should be selected carefully to match the learners' interests and backgrounds, making it easier for them to make sense of the texts. Unfamiliar and difficult words make texts more difficult. When teachers select texts for literacy instruction, the format of the text, including its length, the size of the print and the colours of the print, should be considered, as these features could prove to be overwhelming for younger learners.

### **1.1.3 Context is important and influences literacy learning**

The current South African curriculum supports the view that people learn everything in context. This case study has highlighted the fact that the learners' home literacy experiences and backgrounds undoubtedly play a significant role in literacy development. The outcomes-based curriculum recognizes the diversity of experiences that learners bring from home. Young children who have had exposure to print and stories in a supportive home environment, will have a good literacy basis for teachers to build on. Certain learners will have limited literacy experiences that might negatively influence their literacy development in schools. Teachers are encouraged to capitalize on the interests and prior knowledge of learners when planning suitable programs for literacy learning. The teacher must be responsive to the learners' literacy needs, in order to develop appropriate activities that would allow them to achieve the desired literacy outcomes.

It therefore becomes important for teachers to know their school communities, the circumstances of their lives, their knowledge capital, their support networks and their

cultural, language and literacy practices. Without knowledge of the complex realities of learners' lives, educators could be in the precarious position of making impossible literacy demands on learners. With this knowledge, educators will be able to build more culturally responsive and developmentally appropriate literacy pedagogies, especially in classrooms where learners have diverse language and literacy needs. To make the curriculum accessible to those learners, the theories in this study recommend that special consideration be taken in the choice of instructional approach and the level of difficulty regarding text knowledge and content. Teachers need regular critical analysis of the effects of classroom literacy practices, as the results of such analyses would enhance the quality of the work that they do in the classroom towards the achievement of the literacy outcomes.

#### **1.1.4 An expanded understanding of literacy instruction is necessary**

The current literacy outcomes do not describe literacy instruction as simply knowing how to read and write. Literacy instruction according to the seven outcomes, intends to develop the skills of listening, viewing, speaking, reading and writing, within meaningful contexts. It broadens the meaning of literacy to include making meaning of texts, reflecting on and evaluating visual and written texts, finding and using knowledge from texts and engaging with texts on an aesthetic level. There is a specific outcome that is designed to develop the learner's ability to recognize a text as a tool of power that can be used in social, economic and political situations. Such an expanded understanding of literacy instruction necessitates that a variety of practices be developed in classroom literacy teaching, to enable learners to cope with the increased expectations of the literacy outcomes.

#### **1.1.5 Literacy teaching and learning should be intentionally and appropriately planned, so that all learners can achieve the literacy outcomes of the new curriculum**

The literacy outcomes describe the knowledge, skills and attitudes that should be developed in the classroom. The teacher is expected to be aware of and understand what is expected of the learner in literacy learning and provide a range of opportunities that will

help the learners to eventually demonstrate their full potential in terms of the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are described in the outcome. The level of knowledge and skill should be planned appropriately, according to the needs of the learners. Continuous assessment of the learning that is demonstrated and reflection on the teaching practices, should guide the teacher to different approaches in order to move closer to the achievement of the outcomes.

This study has shown that the above-mentioned views do not agree completely with the current literacy practices in this particular classroom. It is suggested that these views be used to direct a new literacy framework for more focused literacy instruction in the South African context, with the intention of accommodating the principles of learner-centredness, active learner participation and very focused learning. An approach that will accommodate all of the above views and principles is explicit teaching (Edward-Groves, 2001).

## **1.2 Explicit teaching**

Explicit teaching may be described as a culture of learning that requires the engagement of both the teacher and the learners in purposeful, relevant and clearly outlined teaching and learning opportunities (Edward-Groves, n.d.). With explicit teaching and instruction, the teacher understands and focuses on the important role that social interaction plays in the pedagogy of literacy and how these interactions create an environment conducive to learning. The teacher has to reflect regularly on her literacy practices and on the beliefs that underlie those practices, as she has to accommodate the diverse literacy needs of her learners. Explicit teaching requires that the teacher should know and apply the following principles, as summarized from Edward-Groves (n.d.):

### **1.2.1 Teachers need to know the learners and respond to their literacy needs**

The talk in lessons shapes the classroom learning and the learning context, using the existing knowledge of the learner and building on what is known. The learners' needs are important to guide meaningful teaching and learning. It is suggested that teachers assess learners' literacy competencies, in order to plan the type of interactions and tasks needed

to further their literacy development. Clear instructional goals must be set and appropriate planning must be done to ensure that what the learners learn, is relevant to the literacy outcomes. Explicit talk and meaningful interactions need to form the basis of any teaching strategy and learners must be actively involved in every literacy activity. The main aim of literacy is to construct the meaning of texts through listening, talking, reading and writing, through a variety of activities.

### **1.2.2 Teachers need to plan and implement focused lessons**

The purpose of explicit teaching is to provide clear directions to teaching and learning that will continue throughout the literacy learning sessions in the classroom, to ensure that learning is focused on the achievement of the outcomes. The learning outcomes must be clear to both the teacher and the learners, to ensure fair and appropriate assessment. The teacher should plan the lesson with a specific goal in mind and engage the learners in suitable and purposeful activities geared towards the intention of the outcomes. Appropriate teacher responses are necessary during classroom interactions, in order to steer learning in the right direction. Discussions can be extended by the teacher, by building on the responses of the learners. It is important for the teacher to provide explicit feedback, to allow the learner to link the learning to the intended goals, throughout the lesson. At no stage should the teacher allow the focus of the main learning agenda to be distracted by behavioural issues. The daily literacy session should focus on a variety of literacy practices. At the end of each session, reflection and review of the learning that has taken place, is important in planning follow-up lessons appropriately, according to the learners' needs. It is important for teachers to question the understanding of literacy that they leave with their learners at the end of the literacy session.

### **1.2.3 Teachers should focus on the classroom talk during literacy instruction**

Throughout explicit instruction, special attention should be given to the talk that is engaged in, in classroom literacy lessons. The learners' talk reflects their interests, their background knowledge and their vocabulary knowledge. It allows the learners' prior knowledge to enhance the new learning that should occur. It also allows the teacher to assess the



diverse literacy needs of the learners in order to plan appropriate and relevant literacy activities. Sufficient opportunities for the development of knowledge and skill in meaningful and relevant activities, will allow the learners to apply these tools in relevant learning across the curriculum. Literacy development occurs through practicing knowledge and skills in different contexts and situations and in this manner, purposeful learning can be accomplished.

## **2. Recommendations**

This study recommends that the teacher's future instructional approach should focus on the teaching of literacy strategies and not only on isolated skills. Teaching literacy strategies should include teaching the learner what the strategy entails, the importance of the strategy and how to apply it to different texts and situations. The teacher will support the learner while they build the capacity to use the strategy, and the teacher support will only be withdrawn when the learner is able to apply the strategy independently. When a learner is able to work independently with a variety of developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive texts, it can be accepted that they are demonstrating successful learning.

The Four Resources Model of Freebody and Luke (1990), is a useful tool to move teachers away from concentrating solely on decoding and comprehension skills and to draw attention to the range of literacy competencies that learners need to learn, to enable them to develop a literacy strategy to work effectively with texts in everyday society and for lifelong learning. These researchers agree that most educators provide adequate opportunities in the classroom literacy lesson for the development of the code-breaking and meaning-making competencies in their model. On the other hand, they argue that educators are neglecting to develop the learners' competencies of effectively using and analysing texts during their early classroom literacy experiences. It must be emphasized that while the Four Resources Model explores different ways of working with texts in a classroom, these literacy practices are of equal importance and must not be used in isolation, as no practice on its own is sufficient to develop literate learners. They point out that if a variety of methods are used for literacy teaching, each method will develop certain literacy competencies in the classroom.

The discussion in Chapter Three shows clear similarities between the literacy practices that Freebody and Luke suggest in their model and the literacy practices described in the South African literacy outcomes. The intention of this study is to redirect classroom literacy teaching towards the achievement of the current literacy outcomes. Therefore, it is recommended that literacy instructional activities be planned, based on the understandings that underpin this model, as discussed in Chapter Two.

It is suggested that the ideal framework for focused literacy instruction in the South African context, include the following practices in everyday literacy instruction:

## **2.1 Learners explore the text**

This would give the teacher the opportunity to find out what the learners know about the text, allow the learners to communicate freely, to share further discussion around the text and to connect the text to their own experiences. The learners' needs within that specific context can be identified for future planning. The value of getting to know the text for meaning-making purposes cannot be over-emphasized.

## **2.2 Learners work with the text in different ways**

Learners should be given sufficient opportunities to work with the text in different ways for the purpose of recognizing the sounds, word and sentences used. This can be accomplished in different ways, bearing in mind that all the learners should be actively involved in these activities. The manner in which the learners engage with the text, will depend on their literacy needs, their level of vocabulary development and their reading levels.

## **2.3 Learners read the text**

The reading of texts is an important aspect that needs to be a daily activity for all learners. The correct choice of text, suitable for the literacy level of the learners, could greatly

influence the success of the reading activity and it is recommended that the teacher should select texts for this purpose very carefully and link the text content with the learners' experience and interest. The aim of these activities is not only to learn to read, but also to develop a love of and the correct attitude towards reading. A wide variety of texts is suggested over a period of time, with the provision that the text becomes more complex as the learners' literacy levels improve.

## **2.4 Learners look critically at the text**

The learners should not only be allowed to make meaning of a text, but also have sufficient opportunities to look critically at texts, starting from the early years of formal schooling. Grade One learners should initially be allowed to look critically at visual texts, gradually progressing to verbal texts. The learners must be guided in the development of this literacy practice and learn to respect one another's viewpoints. This practice requires careful analysis of the text, which is dependent on careful observations of text detail. It is suggested that this practice be a regular part of classroom reading instruction.

## **2.5 Learners create texts**

Opportunities must be provided daily for learners to create texts. The nature and complexity of these activities will depend on the level of literacy development of the learners, bearing in mind that the teacher will plan accordingly. The study has shown that reading and writing are activities that complement each other and both need regular practice for improvement to take place.

Compared with the expectations of the literacy outcomes, the development of the above-mentioned strategies is in line with what the literacy outcomes require from teachers. The daily inclusion of these strategies during literacy teaching should work toward the achievement of the outcomes.

### **3. Concluding Statement**

Education policy planners and curriculum advisors responsible for education planning, teacher development and support, as well as principals who are the academic leaders in schools, should not limit the literacy instruction efforts of Grade One teachers. They should encourage teachers to move beyond their usual instructional methods and to use innovative strategies to enhance the opportunities for literacy learning.

Not only should serious consideration be given to the manner in which teachers are being trained and prepared for the implementation of the Outcomes-based curriculum, but also where the emphasis should be placed for the proper implementation of that curriculum. Pre-service and in-service training and development programs should focus on changing literacy practices that are presently restricting the literacy development of learners in the classroom. This aspect does not fall within the ambit of this study, but will require intensive discussion in future research. However, the recommendations of this study could be used to support such research.

This study concludes that educators remain the key role players for the provision of equitable access to successful literacy learning for all learners. It is the Grade One teacher that experiences and realizes the inequities in the literacy development of children when they first start formal schooling. These inequities need to be acknowledged and appropriately planned for, according to the diverse needs of the learners, within a suitable literacy framework, to sufficiently equip learners with knowledge, skills and attitudes for lifelong learning.

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